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By

JOHN BLOODSTONE

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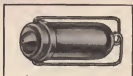
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EDITORIAL AND EXECUTIVE OFFICES, 308 MADISON AVE.,
NEW YORK 17, N.Y.

AMAZING STORIES is published monthly by the Ziff-Davis Publishing Company at 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter July 30, 1937, at the Post Office, Chicago, Ill., under 10 act of March 3, 1879. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada. Postmaster—please return undelivered copies under form 3679 to 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Ill.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: U.S., Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U.S. Possessions, \$4.00 for twelve issues; in British Empire, \$5.00; all other foreign countries, \$3.00 for twelve issues.

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: All communications concerning subscriptions should be addressed to Circulation Dept., 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Ill. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address.

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Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

The Martians' complex weapons had reduced mankind to the status of slaves...until somebody came up with the idea that the defense against complexity is simplicity!

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Illustrated by Ed. Emslar

In a world where brains had replaced brawn, Quirt remained the old-fashioned, fist-swinging type. Naturally this got him into trouble—and the brainy boys out of it!

QUEEN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND (Novelette—10,000) ..by Don Wilcox 112

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A more incredible world could not exist: a queen who talked like a gangster's moll, a junk heap for a kingdom, and a treasury containing uncounted billions!

STRANGE BLOOD (Short—7,000) by Paul W. Fairman 132

Illustrated by Lawrence Wormay

When Donald's mother wanted something—a new silk dress, say—he made it appear. The trouble with a dress like that, though, is that you can end up wearing it...

Front cover painting by Barya Phillips, illustrating a
scene from the story "Land Beyond the Lens"

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THE OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

THERE were six of us at the table: three writers, a couple of science fiction editors, and an almost young woman nobody knew. (Seemed she had the slightly fuzzy illusion that we were part of a leather goods convention in town that week, and since the waiter kept serving her along with the rest, what could she lose?)

THE CONVERSATION drifted along with casual aimlessness until somebody mentioned the atom bomb test going on out near Las Vegas. That jerked the first writer erect in his chair as though his drink had suddenly turned radioactive.

"You just wait," he said darkly. "Won't be long now before we'll be digging A-bombs out of our ears—unless we do the smart thing first."

"What's the smart thing?" one of the editors asked.

"Get out of town, that's what!"

"Easy for you," the editor said. "But what about us guys with jobs?"

The writer made a noise in his throat. "Fat lot of good a job'll do you, once they start dropping that bomb! Two of 'em would blow New York clear to Havana!"

The almost young woman said, "Yeah, you don't want to fool with that Atom Bomb. It's dynamite!"

THE SECOND writer signaled the waiter to do something about the empty glasses, and said, "Don't you believe it. They'll never get over here with them things, lot of talk, that's all."

"Clear to Havana!" the first writer said. "Bang, Bang—and pick up the pieces! Only you'd have to wait a year to get near enough to pick 'em up, what with all the radioactive dust."

"Where," the editor said, "do you get all this information?"

"You kidding?" the writer demanded. "Look what happened at Hiroshima and— and that other town, whatever they called it. Thousands of corpses and every building in miles flattened ten feet into the ground!"

The waiter was back. The almost young woman said, "You can mix mine."

THE EDITOR said, "You're wrong, brother. About a lot of things. First place, even *three* A-bombs dropped on, say, Chicago wouldn't seriously injure more

than five percent of the population. Why? Because it and the other big cities have, or soon will have, concrete and steel shelters in the basements of big buildings in industrial centers. Private homes and apartment buildings have basements too—and any enemy bomber will be spotted in plenty of time for citizens to reach the comparative safety of such places."

THE THIRD writer said, "That sounds good—but just how good is it? These are *atomic* bombs, pal!"

"Look," the editor said. "Heat and blast are what do the big damage. Most of the buildings in a half-mile circle would be destroyed. But if you've got a foot or two of concrete, or even five feet of earth, between you and the heat and blast, you're fairly safe anywhere outside that circle. The important thing is to be *behind* something at the time. Why, at Hiroshima there were a couple of men on the ground floor of a reinforced concrete building *two blocks* from where the bomb went off—and both of them lived through it and the radioactivity."

"And speaking of radioactivity. The first release of it lasts no more than a *minute or two*. It gets sucked skyward by the column of smoke. After that you can pretty well forget about it. Even the radioactivity from an atomic explosion on the ground or under water settles down within an hour or so. Proof? Not one person in Hiroshima or Nagasaki died from what they called 'lingering' radioactivity! Those are the facts."

BY THIS time the first writer's scowl was puzzled. "Are you trying to tell me this A-bomb doesn't amount to much after all?"

"Nothing like that," the editor said. "Anything that can get as hot as the surface of the sun and kick up a 400-mile-an-hour wind isn't what you'd take home to the kids. But I *am* saying that all this talk about lighting out for the hills because of it does you no credit, nor anyone else who talks that way. This is America, my friend—and we never got where we are by running from reality. And I don't like soap-box patriots any better than you do!"

The almost young woman said, "You can mix mine, waiter."

H. B.

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FEED THEM—

OR FIGHT THEM!



By A. T. Kedzie

THE SUN is the source of all life and all energy. Ages ago, when the world was young, it fixed its energy in the form of coal and oil. Today it is still the direct source of all men's energy—through food. Plants, through photosynthesis, extract the energy from sunlight and convert it into chemical energy which eventually powers the human machine. In the final analysis, therefore, men depend upon sunlight.

The natural farming methods by which this energy is captured are inherently inefficient and by no means make the best use of space. Theoretically, only a fraction of the energy available from sunlight is captured by farming methods. In the last few decades, the "tank-farming" system, the method of hydroponics, has assumed some commercial importance and is destined to acquire more. By means of this system, plants are grown in large tanks of chemicals, carefully controlled, and fed at an optimum rate. The result is that they produce large yields for relatively small areas. Unfortunately the hydroponics system is still quite expensive and cannot in general compete with orthodox farming.

The growing shortage of the world's food supply is causing biologists to seek frantically for systems of providing synthetic

food against the time when population growth will demand it. An extension of the hydroponics method has been discovered. It is much the same except that it employs plant forms more basic than tomatoes, potatoes and other complex vegetables; it selects one-celled plants like the algae. Algae, familiar as the greenish scum on the surface of stagnant ponds and pools, are simple one-celled plants which reproduce with great speed under ideal conditions. Grown hydroponically between the walls of glass tubes and fed with carbon dioxide and sunlight, the plants grow at an enormous rate. There, *in toto*, is your food supply! Admittedly, algae of themselves are hardly appetizing, but food-processing techniques might be devised to convert them into something more nearly edible. To nations like Japan and other Asiatic countries, whose food problem, now quite serious, is of growing proportions, the development of synthetics like this may provide the answer. Of some ultimate importance, too, is the fact that algae-growing systems may be efficient food suppliers for isolated groups of men—say, for example, men aboard a space-ship, where every cubic inch counts—or the colonists of the Moon!

YOU CAN WATCH THOSE ATOMS SPLIT!

SHUTTER-BUGS and camera addicts who are interested in high-speed photography will have to sit back and relax in their efforts when they hear of the new high-speed camera using a shutter whose speed is measured not in hundredths, but in millionths of a second! Devised at the research labs of M.I.T. by three scientists, this camera utilizes a shutter which is opened for little more than one microsecond and it can be varied up to some multiples of this.

In essence, the instrument gives scientists another eye, for high-speed photography has solved many important problems. Never, however, have they been able to freeze the speeds which this thing can handle. For example, the shutter is extremely useful in picturing explosions. It can clearly show exactly how a lump of explosive material disintegrates in the few microseconds it takes to go off!

Like most clever apparatus, this gadget

is quite simple in operation and design and depends on an old familiar scientific phenomenon. A strong magnetic field has the property of changing the plane of polarization of light. A series of polarized elements constitute the shutter. They are surrounded by a coil of wire. Under normal conditions the planes of polarization of the elements of glass are opposed so that they are opaque and no light gets through. But when an electric discharge is shot through the coil of wire surrounding the elements, the plane of polarization is altered by the intense—if momentary—magnetic field produced therein. The result is that the shutter transmits light for a micro-second or two, depending on how long the discharge lasts.

The tool will find wide use in the study of transient effects ranging from the discussed explosions to ultra high-speed rotations and the operation of rocket motors—or wherever else almost instantaneous events occur.

—Merritt Linn

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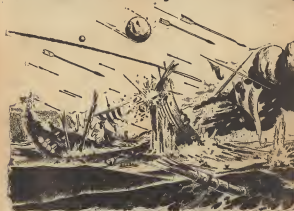
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LAND BEYOND THE LENS

By John Bloodstone

Many things can lead a man toward destruction. For Michael Flannigan it was a song he had never heard — and a woman he could never forget!



Whither has my lost love gone?
Alas, she of laughter,
She whose eyes were like the dawn
Where night embraces day;
She who sings no more of me,
Who walks into eternity,
Taking only memory
Of love, like blossoms, withered. . .

Michael Flannigan could not have told anyone when or where he first heard the words, nor could he have explained their meaning. He could not even tell if they represented a poem or a song, although his opinion inclined toward the latter. For when it did creep into his mind, once every decade or so, it came hauntingly, vaguely, as though in a language he could not define, and giving him the impression of tiny voices singing in a world that Man



Only about 1500 of the battle-hungry green men succeeded in setting foot on shore.

has never known.

It was his greatest secret—one that he had not dared share with anyone. Not even with Louise, the girl who in his normal life had won his normal affections—the affections of an ordinary man who must settle down some day and marry and raise a family, as was to be expected.

But Louise knew, as did her father, Doctor Henry Daren, and as did many of their friends, that aside from the normal Michael Flannigan, Master of Science, electronics expert and rocket test pilot—there was another Michael Flannigan hidden away somewhere, subtly disturbing the balance of all things comprehensible.

In his childhood, she knew, he had heard the wild goose calling. The modern, stereotyped civilization in which he had tried so often to settle down had been defeated in some nameless, indefinable way. It had failed to stamp him into its standard die and produce an even-humored, orthodox scientist. Whether in the physical, mental or spiritual sense, she was sure that for him there would always sound the call of distant and exotic things, of far-off places, of that adventurous beyond which lies on the other side of purple mountains and the Seventh Sea.

He would no sooner appear to settle down than he would be gone again, as though searching restlessly for a nameless thing that always taunted him, luring him relentlessly, eluding him endlessly. South America, Asia, Africa—all the farthest corners of the world failed to yield him what he sought.

She had hoped that with maturity the call would grow dim and die away and that at last she would be able to meet him on the ground she knew, but with the years his restless spirit seemed to want to burst the bounds of Earth itself. And then, when she learned that he was to accompany her father and John Deegan and Ray Gilbert on the moon trip, she felt relieved. Flannigan had wanted to go to the moon all his life. It seemed to his associates that he was actually *destined* to go to the moon. Perhaps that was it, she thought. Once he had achieved this ambition of his life and had returned, literally, to Earth, the wild goose would call no more.

But if she had known where the "wild goose" dwelled, she would never have let him go—if she could help it....

CHAPTER I

AWAKENING

"IF WE HIT much more of this meteor flak we'll have to give up and go home," said Daren, frowning at the radar scope.

"What's the maximum size the hull

can withstand?" This was from Doctor John Deegan, the thirty-seven-year-old astro-physicist, world-renowned despite his youth. A steady, even-tempered man and reliable scholar, just the type to stand up best under the strain of the responsibility, the unknown dangers, and the very close confinement of a ship that cost more than a thousand dollars for every precious pound she carried. He sat in his bunk now, bending over a collapsible plywood writing board, taking copious notes.

"I'd say up to a centimeter," said Ray Gilbert. The newspapers back on Earth were referring to him at that moment as young Doctor Raymond Gilbert, physicist, rocket specialist and ballistics expert, cheerful, capable, practical—possessing a mind that was as steady as a gyroscope. "Mean velocity is enough to give any meteors over that size sufficient mass to penetrate the hull."

"Okay," Deegan said. "Now, what is the mean velocity?"

"Roughly, that of Earth's orbital speed," Doctor Daren replied. "About eighteen miles per second. Of course, most of them are heading sunward and we're traveling toward the new moon, which puts the majority of them on our tail, and as we're hitting about ten miles per second, that still gives them an eight-mile-per-second mean velocity of impact. I wish we could stay on the moon until it's full, so that on our return trip we would enjoy the same advantage, but inasmuch as we're allowed only seventy-two hours there, we'll have to strike back in the face of this celestial flak, and the mean impact velocity against our hull will be about twenty-eight miles per second. This will reduce the minimum size and increase the danger of penetration. Putting it plainly, boys, I'd say we have only a slim chance of

making it back at all. So far, we've tried not to think what would happen if a good-sized meteor hit us. Of course, radar and automatic correction helps to dodge most of the bad ones, but there are just too many meteors in outer space."

"It looks," said Deegan, "as though this first trip out here is going to be the last one for at least twenty years. More work is going to have to be done on the meteor problem. Maybe we'll have to conquer gravity, travel at lower speeds and develop super plating for the hulls."

"Whoa!" exclaimed Gilbert, flashing a smile at his companions. "For the gravity problem, tack on at least ten more years. Leave us not be visionary, chum!"

Doctor Daren did not smile. He spoke slowly and carefully, watching each man intently. "I'd say it would be at least fifty years before another man-carrying space ship will get out here," he said. "You forget that solar radiations and cosmic phenomena abound out here. Do you know what my instruments say?"

Deegan and Gilbert turned slightly pale as they stared back at the older scientist. And even Flannigan looked up from the periscope to listen.

"They say that we've bought a pretty expensive ticket for this trip, and that nobody else in the future is going to want to pay the same price." Daren's listeners knew it was costing the radiologist considerable effort to get out what he had to say.

"What is it, Henry?" asked Gilbert.

"Yes, we can take it!" put in Deegan.

Flannigan only sat there at the periscope and looked at Doctor Daren in silence.

"I want you to understand," continued the latter, "that the instruments are not mistaken. The fact is, we've already been under sufficient

radiation to make us completely sterile. . . ."

THIS WAS followed by a long moment of silence. Deegan had two children. He only frowned and thought of Gilbert, who had just gotten married, and Flannigan, who was engaged to Daren's daughter Louise. Gilbert's mouth dropped, agape in an obvious expression of chagrin, and beads of cold perspiration began to glisten on his forehead. He listened to the muffled "ping!" of tiny meteoric particles as they struck the outer surface of the ship, and he swallowed a great lump in his throat. Flannigan, however, was almost expressionless, except for a barely perceptible tightening of the muscles along his rugged jaws.

"Any reason for continuing onward?" asked Deegan, tonelessly.

Daren sighed, brushing kinky gray hair from his forehead, and replied, "You know the amount of government money that's gone into this expedition. We're supposed to claim the moon in the name of the United Nations. That's the principal political objective. More important still, from the scientific point of view, is my radiation research. The instruments already contain priceless information. And there is more to be gained—much more. In fact, we'll have to send remote-controlled rockets out here later with new types of instruments to pick up new stuff I'm running across that we never knew existed in outer space, or anywhere, for that matter."

"There's your answer," said Gilbert. "Let the robot ships finish the job. I'm for going back while there's still a slim chance!"

"So am I," said Deegan.

Doctor Daren raised a quizzical eyebrow and looked at Flannigan, significantly. All three men looked at Flannigan. He was not the leader of the expedition, but he was the pilot,

the only member who could handle the ship reliably when it came to take-offs and landings. He was a scientist in his own right, and likeable enough on the ground, but out here he had suddenly become as enigmatical as the multifaceted void of space itself. There was something about the space-flying Michael Flannigan that pointed him out as a marked man.

They could not see it in his tanned and rugged face, exactly, but under an unruly mop of jet black hair, there beneath heavy, black brows, was an unusual pair of deep blue eyes. And there it could be seen. A wildness, a desperate restlessness, an almost supernatural longing for the indefinable. At times it had camouflaged itself behind a sort of silent and defiant laughter, but now, out here on the untravelled star road to Earth's far-flung satellite, out here where the mighty Unknown assailed the sanity of the mind and breathed sheer entity into their finite, human fears, they saw that this thing in Flannigan's eyes manifested itself in an expression of determination that defied all the agencies of Man and Nature to thwart it.

Flannigan grinned humorlessly as he replied to their unspoken question. "What was it Columbus said?"

"Sail on! Sail on!" quoted Deegan irritably. "But Columbus had a chance, and he was only wrestling with a few thousand miles of water. We're tweaking the nose of Fate itself, Mike! Be reasonable! I say we turn back!"

"That's two votes," said Flannigan. "What do you say, Doctor Daren?"

"I am an old man," replied Daren, with a sad but eloquent smile.

"Aren't we all!" retorted Gilbert bitterly. "Let's go back! What are we waiting for?"

"For Michael Flannigan," replied Deegan, and there was ice in his tone as he glared at the dark-browed Irishman.

NOW FLANNIGAN'S jaw muscles popped out, hard and lumpy, under a day's growth of beard. He glared at all of them, with his broad back to the control board. Large, muscular hands gripped the panel board on either side of him in an unmistakeable sign of possession. He was a powerful man, fully capable of manhandling any of them.

"Listen to me," he said. "The damage to us is done. We're sterile. No kids. No family. Okay. Now we know. But we're alive—and we're out here. It's a dangerous trip. We're risking our lives every second of it. So what! Did you expect a Cook's tour? What we're doing is the most important thing in history, and half a century may pass before it is tried again. We're in communication with Earth. We can tell them what we're finding out. That information alone is worth a hundred lives. And yet we may come out of this without another scratch. So I say we're going to the moon!"

Doctor Daren might have been proud of his future son-in-law at that moment had he not been troubled by one curious impression. It was what the others felt, too, but could not explain: that Michael Flannigan wanted, more than anything in this life or any other life, to get to the moon, alive or half dead, with his companions or without them. One way or another, he *had* to get to the moon. Though why this was so they knew that even he could not have told them.

"Michael," said Daren, "I am the responsible leader of this expedition. Suppose I ordered you to return to Earth—now?"

Flannigan calmly met the menacing

glare of Deegan and Gilbert. "We'd go to the moon," he answered, "and I'd risk the consequences."

Deegan stood up, clenching his fists. "That's mutiny!" he shouted.

"Not yet," put in Daren, raising his hand for silence. "I have not given him the order to return. I merely wanted to know where we stood. The fact of the matter is, I strongly recommend that we make the attempt. Let's continue onward."

Grudgingly, the two men turned back to their work. But Gilbert paused long enough to look fondly at a pin-up girl on the wall beside his bunk, and his eyes grew red. It was his young wife.

Even if he did live through this, there would be no children. . . .

FLANNIGAN slept, for the first time since their take-off twenty-four hours before. And he dreamed, but it was not a dream that belonged to mortal man.

He was Gur. In his veins flowed the god blood, and he was mighty when Earth was still young.

It was Earth of eons past, before the great cataclysm. Only the beautiful little red people and the alien green men lived there then. The spiritual, fun-loving, music-loving red ones were indigenous to Earth. They were to leave their legend behind them—tales of the little folk, of fairies and leprechauns. The race of green men had come from the stars ages before and had forgotten how to traverse the void again. These were the trouble makers, the usurpers, who made live sacrifice of the red people to their cold stone gods.

But cataclysm threatened the solar system. A large celestial body was approaching the sun, and earthquakes and deadly storms assailed the Earth. The red people and the green people



FLANNIGAN

turned to their gods and prayed.

Then *he* had come—Gur, Bringer of the Lens. Traveling afar in his ship, he had detected the plight of Earth. He had come to its people, a giant, shining god-man of powers and an intelligence beyond their understanding.

The sun would grow very hot, he told them. Its flames would melt the Earth and turn it into lava, and all life would be destroyed. Eons more would pass before the planet would see life again.

So he gave the red people the Lens, and they passed into it, to that other dimension and that great, endless world within, where they would be safe from the very heart of the hottest star—for the Lens was indestructible.

And the green men had come to Gur, laying down their bloodied weapons of war, saying to him that they would mend their ways and give the red men peace, if only Gur would permit them to live in the Land of the Lens.

And he had agreed, saying to them that they must obey one rule only and never break it. His single rule, given to both the red men and the green men, was that there should be peace and freedom forever. In return, they would enjoy security and eternal life, there in the hidden, secret country, the Land of the Lens. If they ever disobeyed his order, he or his son or his son's son, in future time, would return. And he would be called—the Avenger.

As the cataclysm struck, Gur, himself, entered the Lens, to sojourn for an eon or so with the peoples he had saved. While Earth softened, in the cauldron of celestial fire, into a wobbly ball of lava, the Lens remained inviolate, and life went on undisturbed within. Even when the changes occurring on Earth were so violent that a mighty piece of the planet flew away and became a satellite, bearing the Lens with it, the dwellers in the Land

of the Lens knew it not. For there, on their two continents in the endless sea of their hidden world, life was secure and eternal.

Some there were who were killed by accident, on rare occasions, and infrequently a child was born, but most of the original settlers were still young when Gur prepared to leave them.

He did not wish to leave, for he had fallen in love with the fairest of the little women, queen of the red-skinned people. And she with him. Great was her sorrow in those days when she knew that Gur's time within the Lens was ended, and that for reasons she would never understand he had to travel onward in the Outer Emptiness, where the stars shone down on a new and flourishing Earth and on its cold and airless satellite, where lay the Lens.

GUR LEFT the red men in possession of one continent in that secret world and the green men in possession of the other. He reminded them again of his command regarding peace and freedom, and then he left them, to be seen no more.

But Flannigan, in his dream, saw in the hidden land, on the continent of the red men, a vast desert, a desolate wilderness filled with an endless maze of barren ridges of bluish rock, like slate. These ridges formed unscalable walls, and anyone losing his way there would be lost forever. It was here the red men came when they had tired of twice ten thousand years or more of life. This was the Walk Alone, that led to eternal sleep. And here he saw Gur's loved one, the saddened queen of the red ones. It was she who walked there, alone. And he heard, not in his own mind, but in Gur's, the sound of tiny voices singing for him his own lament:

Whither has my lost love gone?

Altinra, she of laughter,

*She whose eyes were like the dawn
Where night embraces day;
She who sings no more of me,
Who walks into Eternity,
Taking only memory
Of love, like blossoms, withered. . . .*

Flannigan awoke with a start, to find Daren wiping his face with a small towel from the first-aid chest. Deegan and Gilbert, pale-faced and bewhiskered, were looking over his shoulder in amazement.

"Good Lord, Michael!" exclaimed the elderly scientist. "You're perspiring enough to dissolve! What kind of nightmare was that? You've been muttering and groaning to yourself for hours!"

Flannigan sat up, staring at his companions wide-eyed, like a madman.

"There's more!" he cried out in desperation, thinking of the song he had heard. "There's another part to it!"

"To what? Your dream? What was it?"

Flannigan shook his head to clear it. "I—I guess it was a dream," he said. "I'm going space batty."

Gilbert smiled wryly. "You have company," he said. "And we still have thirty-six hours to go!"

CHAPTER II

The Bell of Urg

AFTER HIS strange, disturbing dream, Flannigan remained silent, and his companions left him alone with his thoughts—and the periscope. He spent his time observing the moon, which now looked as large as the iridescent Earth astern. He knew that the ballistics called for a landing in the southern part of Mare Serenitatis, but he also knew that that was the wrong place for him. Somewhere in that barren world—the *Lens* was calling. But where?

It was late in the second day out that the meteor struck. The radar compensator could not handle the cloud they were traversing, and an iron fragment the size of a ping-pong ball neatly penetrated the hull. Air began to shriek away through two holes, one on either side of the single cabin the men occupied. But they had come prepared. Within five seconds they had rubberized emergency patches over the holes, and the internal air pressure held them in place. Spiny fingers of frost sprang into place around the patches where moisture in the air contacted the deep cold of outer space, while the battered ship hurtled soundlessly onward.

Without saying a word, they set to work and welded small patches of sheet steel over the holes. Then Gilbert turned on Doctor Daren. His face was pasty white.

"Let's turn back!" he demanded. "I've had enough!"

"So have I," put in Deegan. "Let's get out of here! There's a lot more of this stuff out here, and you know that if we get back at all it'll be a miracle!"

Daren nodded in quiet assent. "We are fortunate," he said, "that no one was cut through by that meteor. I think it is best to return. Flannigan?"

Flannigan looked up slowly from his instruments and turned around to face them. His big hands swatted his knees with a resounding "*smack!*" His eyes bored into Daren's.

"No," he said, in an even voice. But it was emphatic.

Daren's face hardened. "I am in command here," he said. "You will change course for home!"

"No."

In that moment, Gilbert managed to bring into play the wrench he had been hiding. It struck Flannigan heavily on the forehead. The Irishman's eyes closed and he fell to the

floor, while dark blood poured out of the ugly gash between his dark brows.

There was no time for remorse. The other two men knew Gilbert had not intended to kill him. But violent action had been justified, because Flannigan had mutinied.

"Do you think you can pilot us?" Deegan asked Gilbert, after Flannigan's body had been pulled to one side.

"I'll have to. But it'll take hours to decelerate enough to turn around. With our extra fuel we won't have to contact Earth Base for ballistics."

"All right," said Daren, "but get on with it!" His face was a mask of pain and regret as he looked down at Flannigan's prostrate form....

BUT FLANNIGAN was not dead. He was unconscious, while his mind wandered afar. And once again he heard those elfin voices singing an epic song:

*Where wanders Jith'loor now,
The joyful king, our ruler,
gone, of old?*

*Where goeth he, with Ank'torna,
Beloved queen, his lover,
—tale untold!*

*Who stilled the silver flute song
Of Rak'doorjeen the Player
from our heart?*

*Who knelled to him the Death Song
At Eve of Tears and made him
from us depart?*

*No more the myriad children
Of Life and Love and Laughter
we shall behold*

*On Mag'dur's peak or Kild'rn,
On flowered plain of Raŷdur
—they're dead and cold!*

Flannigan felt himself drawn by the strange lament through space and time, into the far-off hidden land....

DJIK'RI HELD his strong spear arm ready, and he poised his *kimblor*-wood shield expertly. He waited calmly for the vicious charge of the Zat, for it was fully aware of his presence. Had he not splattered a *d'nkun'ror* fruit all over its ugly, four-fanged snout? No warrior-hunter of Serin-Gor would have dared to hunt the swift, eight-legged Zat alone other than Djikn Kinri, of whom the bards of the land were already composing songs for coming eons of time.

He grinned excitedly as his keen eyes met those of the Zat. It had crept aggressively forward on the forest path, searching him out for its legitimate supper. Its hairy face and mad red eyes were made the more horrible by a great, slaving mouth held perpetually agape by saber-like tusk-fangs.

Suddenly, it shrieked like an insane man and ran like the wind on its spidery legs straight down upon its smaller adversary. But Djik'ri did not give one inch of ground. His greatest weapon was fearlessness, and since the Zat depended upon freezing its victim with terror, it found itself vulnerable to this unexpected technique.

Djik'ri merely transfixed the beast with his spear and stepped to one side as it died in a bloody frenzy of unvented rage.

The young hunter smiled serenely at the size of his specimen. Even though Djik'ri was taller and stronger than most of his fellow Serin Ni, it made little difference in this case. The single-handed killing of this giant Zat proved that he was a mighty hunter. But Djik'ri wanted most of all to convince himself of his prowess. Let others think what they would. He was soon to reach maturity and he had important plans, brave and daring plans which might one day shake this whole world of Gra'ghr.

He turned and looked happily out

over the flowered plain of Raj'dur, down from the forested slopes of Mag'dur, and out upon the glistening white, stone city of Rurz'tlid and to the blue expanse beyond, which he knew was Ces'son Nar—the Barrier Sea. He drew up the full one-foot-and-nine-inches of his athletic frame, patted the red skin of his stomach and swelled out his chest. Ah, but it was good to be alive in this beautiful world! This night he would send a prayer to Gur, thanking him for all the wonders of life that were his to enjoy!

Suddenly, there rolled up to him out of the city a very discordant sound. Djik'ri knew that terrible sound too well, but he tried almost with a superhuman effort of the will to convince himself that he had not heard it.

"No! Lord God Gur!" he shouted to the sky in sudden sorrow. "Let not the black Bell of Urg toll forth!"

But in a moment he heard the sound again, and no longer could he deny that Urg had come. The dreaded sound rolled over the countryside like a tidal wave, drowning the spirit of life and hope.

Sadly, Djik'ri wiped off his spear and prepared to go home, even forgetting the tremendous Zat he had killed. He was thinking of his people and their heavy hearts at the sound of the Bell of Urg. And he thought of his sister, Mnir'sr Nikin'ra, queen ruler of Serin-Gor. She in particular would suffer the depths of sorrow. He must comfort her.

Accursed Urg! One day he, Djikn Kinri the Hunter, Son of Jith'loor, would end this law of the ages, and Urg would be no more.... As he walked down the hunting road, through the colorful plain of Raj'dur, his greenish-blue hair waved in the wind, and his ink-black eyes glared defiantly at the temple tower from which had knelled the mournful announcement

that Urg, the Season of Death, had begun....

MNIR'SR NIKIN'RA the Queen, known to all her devoted friends and subjects as Mnir'ra, laughed like a happy child. The gaseous *ntik'a* water boiled about her like a dazzling cloud of pearls in the bright yellow light of the four suns of Gra'ghr. It warmed her naked body and bouyed her up and tickled her all at the same time as she was carried down the rapids in a race with Djur Djinri the Swimmer.

All of the people of Serin-Gor were born swimmers, but they swam best of all in the warm, bubbling spring waters of the River Toor, which passed through the bright city of Rurz'tlid. And never were they so enthusiastic as when their young queen took part in their sports. Naked and beautifully this red people swam, strong men and graceful women, innocent of shame, deserving tenants of the paradise in which they lived.

"Mnir'ra tied Djur'ri!" cried a chorus of young men and women at the end of the race, where the river turned toward the sea. The contestants sprawled all about on great, warm, white rocks near the arched stone bridge that led to the palace. A dozen eager hands reached out to help their beloved ruler out of the water.

Mnir'ra laughed in triumph at having tied Djur'ri, the champion, in the race. And she laughed for the sheer joy of living, a joy which was enhanced, perhaps, by the realization that hers was the greatest beauty in the land. Her delicate skin was not as reddish as that of most of the girls, but rather an inimitable shell-pink color. Her hair was the purest blue of the sea, reaching almost to her waist.

Her maids threw a great white robe about her shapely shoulders and began to comb and brush her voluminous



PRINCESS MNIR'SR

hair as she sang to all who were within range of the clear fairy piping that was her voice. Mnir'ra the Singer began to sing the Song of Life:

*We sing to Life, our eyes look up,
Alight with joy and laughter.
There is no strife, we fill our cup
Today and ever after.*

*Our joyous call of life and love
Through endlessness goes ringing
To purple Ral, swift moon above,
Who hears our people singing.*

"Who hears our people singing!" chorused her listeners.

Boom-m-m!

The singing stopped.

Boom-m-m!

Joyous faces turned pale and all eyes looked up river at the great temple tower.

Boom-m-m!

"The Bell of Urg!" cried Djur'ri sorrowfully.

"Oh, hateful Urg!" cried others. "How surely does Urg cast its shadow on the path of light!" "It is a thing accursed!" "It should never be!"

All began to cover their graceful forms with their bathing robes and excuse themselves from the young queen's presence. Sadness had leapt upon them like a deadly, nocturnal Kran'jandoon, enmeshing them in its writhing, inescapable web. The shadow of death was to lie upon the land of Serin-Gor for six purple moons.

QUEEN MNIR'SR NIKIN'RA said nothing after that. The knelling of the black Bell of Urg continued from the temple while she walked in sorrow back to the palace. There she was dressed in the mourning robes of the Urg season, and she soon retired to the gardens to walk alone with her thoughts.

She cried bitterly in protest against

the Law of Urg. While she sat by the great fountain of the palace garden and wept, some of the royal bards, playing their stringed instruments atop the palace towers, faced the lowering suns and began to sing the traditional Song of Urg.

The sad, elfin, trembling notes of their instruments, the tearful singing of the bards, and the vivid realization of the sorrowful task before her, because of the Law of Urg, made Mnir'ra sob as though her heart would break.

She must, within six purple moons, herself select one hundred youths and one hundred maidens, to be made ready for the ships of the green men, the powerful and ferocious Bi'djar Ri from across the Barrier Sea. These youths were not of the eternal stock who had lived beyond the reckoning of memory. They had to be like herself and her brother Djik'ri—new born and just coming to maturity, or just arrived to it. They would be sacrificed to the bloody stone gods of the green men.

Her mind dwelled in bitterness upon the clever treachery of her enemy. The ancient command of Gur, Bringer of the Lens, had been that there should endure peace and freedom forever, between red men and green men alike. Or else the Son of Gur, the Avenger, would come back through the Lens. She doubted that the green men still believed in the old legends. In fact, most of her own people seemed to regard the ancient tale of the Lens as a children's story. Yet Mnir'ra saw in the plan of the green men a clever loophole, should the Avenger ever really come. For under the Law of Urg, established by mutual agreement between the red-skinned Serin Ni and the green-skinned Bi'djar Ri, peace and freedom still remained, though in name only. In ages past, the Bi'djar Ri had threatened to invade the land

of Serin-Gor unless the red men agreed to supply them, at precise intervals, with victims for their sacrifices. This, they said, would serve to keep the peace, and the Serin Ni would maintain their freedom.

Mnir'ra reflected that if the priests of the red men of Gur had had real faith in the promise of their god that he or his son or his son's son would return, in case of war, the Law of Urg would never have been established. But they had been of little faith in those days, as they were now, and they had feared the green men. And so the Law of Urg became fixed in the pattern of their existence. Every hundred purple moons the Bell of Urg knelled forth its call of death in the land of Serin-Gor.

The Law of Urg had become an ancient and unbreakable pact. It called for hideous tribute, payment in life's precious blood, for the privilege of not being invaded. And in these times the law was more rigidly enforced than ever before, by Gon'sr Lit'ri, the present ruler of the Bi'djar Ri. In fact, some suspected that one day this famous Gon'ri the Warrior, as he was called, would break the pact and conquer Serin-Gor anyway. For he, of them all, believed nothing of the old legends. He believed only in appeasing the hungry gods of his own land.

But life under him would be without happiness of any kind, and the sacrifices would not only continue. They would increase without limitations. As long as he did not break the pact, therefore, the tribute required by the Law of Urg was the lesser of the two evils, but it almost strangled Mnir'ra's compassionate heart to contemplate her dreaded responsibility as ruler of the land, during the Season of Urg.

"It is sad," said a deep voice beside her, "that you know nothing of the art of rationalizing, Queen Mnir'ra."

MNIR'RA turned her tearful face upward to look into the cold eyes of Zrand'ir Nzini, High Priest of Gur. He was almost as tall as her brother, Djik'ri, but he had a lean and hungry look about him which reminded her more of the Season of Urg than of the Hundred Moons of Life which came between. Always during the Season of Urg, Zrand'ri seemed to take more interest in his job than at any other time. He it was who always rang the black Bell of Urg when the hundredth purple moon had set.

"What must be must be," he told her. "Can you not control your mind sufficiently to accept facts as they are? It is such folly to subject yourself each time to these rebellious emotions! As Queen you should be strong and uphold the Law of Urg, as did your father, Jith'loor, and your queen mother before you. Tomorrow you must prepare the lots which shall be drawn."

Little Queen Mnir'ra sat up and tried to dry her eyes, but more tears flooded out upon the others. "May Gur have mercy on me!" she cried. "But I curse the Law of Urg! It is not a way to keep the ancient commandment! It is sacrilege! I can think nothing else of you, Zrand'ri, than as a worshipper of the heartless gods of the Bi'djar Ri, so zealously do you seek to gather their innocent victims!"

Zrand'ri darkened visibly at this. He straightened up, tall and forbidding in his black robe, and he glared down upon Mnir'ra in righteous wrath. He even raised his hand to strike her, but then hesitated, mindful of the palace guards who were fanatic about their queen.

"Who speaks of sacrilege!" he cried out. "What horror of words is this from the mouth of a queen! You must come to the temple and pray to Gur to erase those words from the Book of Judgement, where they have surely

been written against you!"

"If I pray at the temple, or anywhere else," cried Mnir'ra, "it will be to ask Gur to lift from this land the curse of Urg!"

Zrand'ri decided to change his tactics. He calmed down and appeared to reason with her. "But do you not love this fair land? Surely you would not want Gon'ri the Warrior to invade it and lay it waste and make of us a nation of slaves!"

"No!" cried Mnir'ra, helplessly. "But someday Serin-Gor must grow strong enough to overthrow the Bi'djar Ri, and then—"

"That day will never come," smiled Zrand'ri, amused. "You are children of play and song and dancing. You know naught of industry and progress. Else by now you would have great ships to cross the sea, and metal bows for your arrow, to fight back at those who come to take the toll of Urg!"

Mnir'ra could not deny the superiority in strength of her despised enemy. Nor could she guess what means might be used to overcome him.

"You should be sensible and do what is your duty," argued the High Priest of Gur. But he was thinking more than he expressed in words.

No one in all the land of Serin-Gor knew the secret thoughts of Zrand'ri, probably because they could not imagine such deception. Zand'ri, too, was tired of Urg, but not because it pained him to see the land deprived of youths and maidens. It was because he longed for power over the land. He, Zrand'ri, wished to be king in place of Djikn Kinri, who was soon to reach maturity and acquire the throne from his sister. And he had already entered into a secret plan that had been found attractive to Gon'ri the Warrior—a plan which might gain support from the green man ruler in acquiring for Zrand'ri the throne of

SerIn-Gor....

"Good day, my queen," said the priest, suddenly, for he had seen the striding figure of Djik'ri the Hunter enter the garden gate from the palace. He desired as little conversation as possible with that hot-headed upstart. Hurriedly, he walked toward a side entrance to the garden.

MNIR'RA looked up at her brother with a sad but welcoming smile. She stretched out her hand to him and pressed his own hand firmly.

"Dear Djik'ri," she said, "the sight of you is my only consolation in this dark time. I need you so!"

Djik'ri lay a hard, muscular hand on the fine blue hair of her head and stroked it fondly. He had asked her as a favor to him never to cut it, and now it lay down her back, a sea of loveliness.

"Poor Mnir'ra," he said. "I want to help you. Ever since the Bell of Urg began to toll I have been thinking of many things. You know, today I killed a giant Zat."

Mnir'ra looked up at him quickly, her brow furrowed with concern. "Ah, Djik'ri, how often have I begged you not to risk your life like that! Why do you do it!"

Djik'ri looked sternly at her. "Because I must prove my strength," he said. "Do you recall what accursed day is my birthday?"

"It was a *blessed* day when you were born, my brother!" she protested, kissing his hand in an outburst of affection.

"You know it is the Day of Urg, on which the sacrifice victims must depart on the ships of the Bi'djar Ri. But *this* Day of Urg, six purple moons from now, I shall be of age! What does that mean to you?"

"Thank Gur, you will be king, Djik'ri!"

"And from that moment on I shall

prepare this land to fight the green men and rid the world of the Law of Urg!"

"But that will bring only war and bloodshed and defeat for all of us, my brother! How can you hope to fight the green men who have strong metal bows and great ships of sail?"

Djik'ri's fists clenched and his jaws tightened. "Somehow, I shall find a way," he said bitterly.

From the palace roof, while the four suns of Gra'ghr went down beyond Ces'son Nar, the bards still sang the endless Song of Urg, which went on day and night throughout the Season of Urg:

*Fair Nil'ra hears us crying,
She hears the mir'h trees sighing
'neath Purple Moon.*

*O ancient Queen of Beauty,
Thy love-path in the woodland
was left too soon!*

*No more your sandaled footsteps
Tread light the hills of Rurz'tlid,
where r'ur birds cried.*

*You sleep where Yuh'dliir slept
In caves of dread, where Jin'r hid
and our hearts died!*

"Djik'ri," said Mnir'ra softly.

"Yes?" Djik'ri had been carried away by racial memories which the wailing Song of Urg engendered in his mind.

"Let us go up and pray to Gur."

"For what?"

"Have you no faith, then, Djik'ri?"

Djik'ri looked sullenly at the ground. "Faith?" he said. "I sometimes wonder at a god that would accept Zrand'ri as his priest."

"Djik'ri! Do not say that! I hold with you that Zrand'ri is not good, but I, for one, still firmly believe in the ancient legend of the Lens. Remember, Gur's promise was that, if peace and freedom were disturbed, he

or his son or his son's son would return, and he would be called the Avenger. If we have genuine faith, then all we have to do is reject the Law of Urg. If Gon'ri attacks, his very act of aggression will bring us the Avenger!"

DJK'RI STUDIED his sister for a long while. Then he said, "Would that I might share this faith with you. But I can do one thing! I can match your faith with an army. Then, if the Son of Gur fulfills the ancient promise, he will have us as his loyal allies, to fight by his side. If he does not come—there will still be the army, and me!"

Mnir'ra laid her hand on her brother's arm. "Have faith, Djik'ri. Let us ask Gur to deliver us all from the curse of Urg!"

"Then let Gur give us a sign, a thing that I may see with my eyes! Come! I have a prayer for Gur myself!"

On the roof of the palace, in a section removed from the players and singers of the endless Song of Urg, Mnir'ra and Djik'ri lighted holy fires to Gur, and Mnir'ra said her prayer first:

"Great Gur, hail to thee, O Bringer of the Lens! Hear me, Mnir'ra, distant daughter of thy sacred love of old, Altinra, she who walked alone in Zi'ilgar-Lon, the Desert of Death, to mourn thy absence and to seek eternal sleep! Now her faith is born anew in me, and I am thy humble servant who bows before thy eternal wisdom and begs thy indulgence in this dark hour of sorrow. Grant us, O shining God of eons past, that our people will never more set foot upon the ships of the Bi'djar Ri to die in sacrifice to the false gods of our enemy! Return, O Gur of our fathers, or send us Gurund Ritroon—Son of Gur, the Avenger—to

win us justice and safety from our dreaded enemy and enable the people of Serin-Gor to live in peace and freedom and happiness forever!"

Almost expectantly, Mnir'ra raised her face toward the heavens, where now only Lan Ba'na, the golden moon, pursued her departed brother, Ral, through the starless sky of Gra'ghr. Djik'ri, too, looked for some sign of response to the prayer.

Then, as a king might speak, he looked up at the sky and said, "Great Gur, soon I shall be king. I have made myself strong, O Gur, and it is in my heart to make my people strong to fight against the wild armies of Gon'ri the Warrior. Give me, therefore, some sign that thou wilt put thy strength behind me! Lend thy great hand to this cause, O mighty Gur!"

Again, both worshippers looked expectantly at the sky. But again they saw nothing but Lan Ba'na, the golden moon. After a while, Djik'ri frowned angrily at the sacred fires.

"There is no god," he said, "nor are those fires sacred. It is all but sham and illusion. We are alone upon this globe, and the battle is ours to fight alone."

Mnir'ra suddenly stood up and gripped her brother's shoulder. He looked at her and found her pointing in amazement toward a distant point which lay beyond the dark shoulder of Mag'dur.

"We have been looking in the wrong direction!" she exclaimed. "We forgot the *ancient* temples, where Gur once truly lived! There is a light, Djik'ri! Look!"

Djik'ri looked, and then he became speechless with wonder. For there where he knew the incredibly ancient ruins of the temples to be, he saw vague tendrils of white light reaching upward into darkness.

"There is your sign!" cried Mnir'ra.

"It is a signal to us! A call!"

Djik'ri looked unblinkingly at the weird lights in the distance, until they faded suddenly into darkness again.

"I must follow that sign," he said, "to prove that it was not some useless hallucination. It must yield a definite symbol or message to me from Gur, and if it be so then I shall take great courage and have great strength as king. Mnir'ra, I must go at once!"

"Take me with you!" she pleaded, excitedly, not fully realizing what strange things were stirring in her breast. "I, too, must see this miracle, for I feel that the ancient power of the Lens is awakening!"

"Then follow me!"

NONE THERE were who saw the yellow-haired, gryphon-like Ban'thorn with its hawkish head which carried Djik'ri and his sister swiftly on its silent paws across the rising plain of Raj'dur, under the bright rays of Lan Ba'na, the golden moon of Gra'ghr.

They rode afar, for the ancient temple ruins lay beyond the shoulder of Mag'dur. They rode onward through the night, deep into wilderness, searching desperately for a physical proof of the great miracle for which they had prayed....

CHAPTER III

Into the Lens

GILBERT instructed his two companions to tie themselves into their bunks in preparation for heavy deceleration. Flannigan's body had been picked up off the floor and placed in his own bunk. They had strapped it down extra tight.

As the deceleration increased, the blood drained from their faces and their flesh pressed against their skulls

so that the face of each man looked like a shining death's head. Daren blacked out first, then Deegan. But Gilbert clenched his teeth until he thought he had welded his jaws together forever, and he struggled to peer out of an encroaching blackness, while his tense, white fingers clutched the remote control beside him which activated the decelerator feed-valves.

He was reflecting, dimly, that a man might weigh about fourteen hundred pounds now if he could be put on a scale. Then, suddenly, he thought he was losing his mind, for out of the corner of his eye he saw Flannigan's form move! He could barely turn his head, but when he finally did he saw Flannigan staring at him through the caked blood that half covered his face! Gilbert knew, when he saw the hideous, open gash splitting Flannigan's forehead, that the man would be scarred for life, if he lived to see the Earth again.

There was a loud report, as though someone had fired a gun in the room, and Flannigan sat up between broken safety straps. Gilbert froze with terror, for this *was* supernatural! Either that, or he was out of his mind and suffering delirium tremens.

Now Flannigan unloosened his remaining straps and stood up, where no human being could possibly stand. Except for the half-mask of blood on his face, he was colorless, almost white as marble, and he glistened with perspiration. Slowly, as though Gilbert were seeing him in the unreality of a dream, he crossed the room and removed Gilbert's fingers from the remote control. His hand seemed cold.

Within a few seconds, the deceleration was stopped, and color began to come back into everyone's faces, all except Flannigan's. Daren and Deegan came to and looked in uncomprehending amazement at their pilot.

"He's inhuman!" screamed Gilbert hysterically. "He broke his straps and stood up! He just walked over and took control!"

"Flannigan!" said Daren peremptorily.

But Flannigan kept his eyes glued to the periscope. It was as though he were unaware of their existence.

Deegan rose silently to his feet and made a sign to Daren and Gilbert. Slowly, tensely, the three of them got together in the middle of the room, shoulder to shoulder. And then they sprang upon the Irishman.

Headlocks, armlocks, rabbit punches and mad, desperate lunges and tug-gings all proved to be of no avail. Flannigan merely turned around and flung them to the opposite end of the control room. They lay panting in the spell of a nameless fear, for they had felt in their opponent an irresistible strength that was alien to their kind.

His strange, deep blue eyes stared at them in such a way that they could not endure it, and they turned their faces, only to look back again in horrified fascination.

"Flannigan!" gasped Daren from his spot on the floor. "What in the name of Heaven has come over you! You are taking us all to our deaths! You know that! We've got to turn around! Go back, Flannigan! Go back!"

"It is said that God created the Universe," said Flannigan, in a rumbling, stentorian tone they had never heard before. "But there are other universes—and my own destiny would be incomprehensible to you. So you shall do as I say, until we get to the moon. After that, the ship is yours. I can explain no more."

THEY DID not land in Mare Serenitatis. Flannigan had seen, at last, what he knew he had been

looking for all his life, yet he was sure no human eyes could have discerned the eerie tendrils of light reaching out into space toward the tiny rocket. Ghostly hands of an ancient power, calling the Wanderer home...

Beyond Serenitatis they hurtled, close now, so close that the chalk white, towering walls of the lunar Apennines swept past within twenty miles. Lower still, hurtling across Eratosthenes and onward toward the fifty-mile crater of Copernicus, almost to the ageless shore of Mare Imbrium. Then, a blood-draining turn, and they were coming down, stern first, alongside the Earth-illuminated walls of the crater Rheingold.

After the landing had been secured, Daren said, "We are the first men on the moon, Flannigan. I don't know what your plans are, but now that we're here we'll have to communicate with Earth Base concerning our new position and the ballistics for take-off. I believe they'll still make us wait here the planned seventy-two hours. In view of this I'd like to continue as planned and make our explorations and tests."

"I said that when we reached the moon the ship would be yours," Flannigan replied. He was already entering the hatch to go below to the space suits and the airlock.

But Daren detained him, trying to find some trace of the old Flannigan in those cold blue eyes. "Where are you going?" he said. He, too, noticed the ghastly wound on the other's forehead and knew it would leave an indelible scar.

Flannigan looked at him with that piercing, alien look that was so hard to endure. "I go where no man may tread," he answered. "So don't try to follow me."

Daren looked at Deegan and Gilbert

and saw that they were as helpless as he was to detain the other. Then he looked back into the alien blue eyes.

"We have just seventy-two hours, Flannigan," he said. "Maybe less."

"Don't look for me."

Daren's fingers gripped Flannigan's shoulder, hard. "Don't be a fool, man! What about returning to Earth—to Louise!"

Just for a fleeting instant, Flannigan's eyes softened. Then he said, "I am sterile."

"Is that why you're determined to commit suicide?"

"This is far from suicide. It is an awakening—and a duty. Goodbye!"

"Then we'll have to return without you?" Daren called through the hatch.

But Flannigan was already getting into his space suit....

UNDER THE bright, bluish-white light of the Earth, the moon lay cold and terribly silent, its jagged mountains and crater walls looking like the jumbled ruins of a city of Titans—now resentful of being disturbed out of its sleep of ages. Flannigan, under his armor plate hood and back shield, was climbing the jagged wall of Rheingold. Once in a while, a tiny meteoric particle pinged against his hood, but outside of that he was surrounded by the cloying, almost tangible stillness of interplanetary space. He paused only once to look back at the ship. It lay over a mile below him, a tiny, dim spot of Earth-light reflection. Daren and the others, he reflected, must have claimed the moon already in the name of the United Nations.

He looked upward also at the looming face of Earth—the planet that had borne his flesh but not his spirit. The part of him that was a man turned fleetingly to earthly memories—white gulls gliding on the tangy air over the

small blue bay of Mazatlan, colored sails in the sunset off Waikiki, the blinding whiteness of eternal snow mantling the Andean horizon across lofty Titicaca, the multi-laned traffic at Wilshire and Western in Los Angeles, the misty panorama of San Fernando Valley in the early morning, the smell of fresh coffee, the warm breath and the soft lips of a blonde, blue-eyed girl—Louise. Perhaps—no, he was quite sure of it—he would never see these things again. Beyond Earth, the unblinking abyss of stars was like the raven, saying—"Nevermore!"

He turned his face again, abruptly, toward the rim of Rheingold, beyond which dawned a corona of writhing light which he knew was not being registered by his eyes of flesh and blood. There was an older eye, and an older blood—and these were responding now to the call of the Lens, with a will that was his own and yet not his own, but which he had to admit was superhuman.

Even in the midst of it all, Flannigan, the man, had to ask himself: What is a god supposed to do? Because he knew that such he would be—in the Land of the Lens. An ancient destiny, written on the sands of time that were buried under a thousand strata before the birth of Man, had made it so....

Three hours later, Flannigan entered a crevasse that split the inner wall of Rheingold. He followed the natural floor, wading ankle deep in cosmic dust that rose and fell with peculiar abruptness, having no air to support it. In his tanks there was air, however. Enough for three days. Under the light lunar gravity he was carrying six hundred Earth pounds of equipment.

There beneath the lunar surface, in a low-roofed cavern, he found the Lens. He could only guess at its di-

mensions, because it glowed now with a light that was detectable even to his physical vision, and it half blinded him. He could only make out that it was half imbedded in a wall of frozen lava, a wall that had once been boiling liquid in the unimaginable heat of solar disruption, but which could never affect the alien substance of the Lens.

As he approached it, his steps faltered, and finally he stumbled and fell to the ground, his senses reeling. A million fish-hooks, it seemed, were plucking the flesh from his bones—and a cosmic force hurled him into vastness, where the Maelstrom of Creation spun him into vertigo. He felt finite and infinite, instantaneous and eternal, occupying nothing and yet filling all time and all space, while an incomprehensible sound, the almost undetectable diminuendo and the unendurable crescendo and crashing of the music of the spheres, assailed him and fanned the forces of his life into a flame that consumed the finite man and forged a new being: a godling, drifting down paths not traversed for eons, into a far-off place, a secret land—the hidden Land of the Lens....

HHE AWOKE to the sound of wild birds singing, and through his mind ran the words of a song he had heard before:

*No more your sandaled footsteps
Tread light the hills of Rurz'tlid
when r'ur birds cry...*

And he knew these were the *r'ur* birds. He knew that the wind he heard was sighing in the purple-flowered *mir'h* trees that stood about among the towering walls of the ancient temple ruins. For this was Serin-Gor, and Djik'ri the Hunter and Mnir'ra the Singer were coming to him

here in the wilderness to bid him welcome. They would be riding a gryphon-headed Ban'thorn, hastening to find him and serve him, for he was Gurund Ritroon—Son of Gur—the Avenger.

He knew what had brought him here. He understood the trouble that was in the land, and he knew who would be his friends and who would be his enemies. Chief among these latter were Zrand'ri, the false High Priest of Gur, and across dark Ces'son Nar, the Barrier Sea, lay Bi'djar-Tan, land of the green men, home of Gon'ri the Warrior, who was an unbeliever, a would-be conqueror standing at the head of unnumbered, battle-hungry men, plotting to defy the ancient commandment, to destroy the peace and freedom established by his father, of old. Here there was work to do.

But first of all, Gurund Ritroon was hungry. He shook his head to clear it of dizziness, and then he got to his feet. He was naked, but that could wait. His people, the Serin-Ni, would clothe him. In the meantime, a skirt of *kimblor* bark would suffice.

So in the dawn light of the four suns of Gra'ghr he walked naked into the forest in search of food. He had not gone far before he was confronted by a hideous eight-legged creature that was half again his own size. It had an ugly, four-fanged snout, and when it charged him it shrieked like an insane man.

The Zat pounced upon its strange, white prey and caught the large man-thing's muscular arm between its powerful jaws. But the man-thing took it by the mouth and easily tore its jaws apart. As it died, it realized, vaguely and too late, that this was no man-creature of Serin-Gor. It was the mightiest being in the world....

Later, when Gurund Ritroon stepped out of the forest to look at

the wild shoreline of Ces'son Nar, where lay the great temple ruins, he wore a skirt of scarlet *kimblor* bark. And he was not hungry any more. Only thirsty.

He stood on the edge of a low bluff, above rock-strewn sand, and he sniffed the air. Somewhere in the depths of his mind a memory stirred, of another place which someone attached to his past had known in the days of his childhood. A green, peaceful place called Kilarney. This place reminded him of it. This was the magical place, the hidden land of the tiny folk—the leprechauns—this other-world memory seemed to tell him. But he was small now, himself, whereas in that other life he had been large. Even so, he knew he was a head taller than the red people, and all the strength of that other-world man, plus some the Lens had added, was concentrated in his small, densified frame. That was why the Zat's teeth had only scratched him lightly, and that is why he had been able to tear it apart.

He passed his hand over his forehead. He expected to find an open wound there, but there was none. Whatever had been the injuries, defects or weaknesses of that other self, they had been obliterated by the Lens. He was reborn.

TO HIS LEFT was a small waterfall. He leapt to the beach below him and approached it. Something stirred within his spirit as he walked. He did not know what mysterious thing it was, but he sensed that it was good. Perhaps it was the sweetness of the scented air, or his sense of terrible strength and well-being—or an awareness of achievement, of something he had wanted to accomplish for millenia of time. Maybe that was it. He had arrived at last to search for his lost love Altinra, or was it

his father's love, or someone else in whom the memory of Altinra had been born again?

When he drank from a great, clear pool at the foot of the waterfall and saw bright, silvery fish swim toward a cool-green, sandy bottom, he felt better than ever.

Then, suddenly, when he looked up, he saw them. They were seated on the Ban'thorn, on the opposite side of the pool. The weird beast stared fixedly at him with baleful yellow-green eyes.

On its back sat Djik'ri, a handsomely built little fellow. His skin was reddish; his hair, which touched his muscular shoulders, was of a glistening blue-green color; and his fearless but somewhat amazed eyes were coal black. He wore trunks and sandals, and on his back was a large quiver which contained three long spears. At his side was a long wooden shield. He carried no other weapon but a small, stone hunting knife.

As the Ban'thorn he was riding turned sideways, birdlike, to get a better view of the situation, Gurund Ritroon saw Mnir'ra, who rode behind the little red man. Her complexion was light rose, or sea-shell pink. Her voluminous hair was a glistening soft blue that combined the shades of sea and sky. Her eyes, which looked directly into his with a childlike, searching intentness, were pools of midnight. She wore sandals and filmy trousers, laced tight at the ankles and full to the hipline, where they seemed to become part of her body, terminating at the waist. She wore nothing else except a black cloak over her shoulders, which was held there by two straps that met between her collar bones under a beautiful, jewel-studded medalion, the symbol of her royal rank. It was a glistening, twelve-pointed star, resting between two pale rose breasts which seemed to the god-man

who looked at her to be the crowning jewels of her adornment.

Time went on, but nothing happened. He only stared at the little blue-haired queen, caught as though in a magic spell by her eyes. And she, herself, appeared to be in some sort of spell, for her companion noticed her attitude with some wonderment.

"*Y'ujiyo e'si'ia uz'o?*" he called, and the god-man understood: "Who are you?" Djik'ri had asked. "And where do you come from?"

In their own language, he shouted back in a mighty voice that crashed booming above the waterfall: "You know who I am and whence I come, else you would not have ridden here to find me!"

He saw Mnir'ra's eyes widen with wonder and delight, and she cried out to her brother in a silvery voice, but her words were lost in the roar of the waterfall. Djik'ri guided his mount unhesitatingly into the pool and it swam, though somewhat unwillingly, in his direction. It did not like his large proportions and it let out cackling cries of alarm to express the opinion. But Djik'ri goaded it on, relentlessly, like the master rider he was.

The god-man held his ground, waiting for them. He smiled reassuringly as they approached. When they came up on the shore about six yards from where he squatted, they dismounted. The Ban'thorn immediately ran to the seashore and waited there at a safe distance.

THE TWO beautiful little people stood where they were, hesitant, just slightly fearful of him. For to them he was of heroic proportions, white of skin—which was alien—so white, in fact, that he seemed to glisten like shining marble. He was even taller than the dreaded Bi'djar Ri, taller, perhaps, than even Gon'ri the

Warrior. If they could see him standing up they knew he would be fully as tall as a god should be, a tall, shining god, as was Gur, in ages past.

Then he did stand up, and he began to walk toward them, but that seemed to be a mistake, because they both retreated, instinctively, in spite of their great hope that he was the one they sought. So then he stood still.

"I am Gurund Ritroon," he said. "I come from the Outer Emptiness, which lies beyond the Lens."

At once, the other two dropped to their knees and bowed their heads, with arms and fingers extended in his direction.

"Hail, Son of Gur, the Avenger!" he heard Mnir'ra cry out. "Thanks be to Gur that you did not fail us in our time of need! The ancient promise is fulfilled!"

The god-man hesitated. He knew precisely the role he was to play, knew he had great strength, perhaps even immunity from physical harm. But not all was clear to him. He did not know what powers he possessed, if any. He was vaguely disconcerted that his plan and strategy were not clear and certain in his mind, that he should be compelled, like any man, to think of each step he must take as each circumstance presented itself. What was a god supposed to do?

"Arise," he said, for want of anything more appropriate to say.

Whereupon the red man arose, as did his female companion. He took her hand and led her slowly toward the god-man, close, enchantingly close. The god-man's deep blue eyes looked down into hers, and she colored deeply in her embarrassment.

"You are Mnir'ra Nikin'ra, Queen of the Serin Ni," he told her. "I have heard your prayer, and I am here."

Without knowing why, he reached out his hand, as that dimly remem-

bered other self might have done. Djik'ri was the first one to take it. Instead of merely shaking it, however, he fell to one knee and pressed it humbly to his forehead. His own hand was surprisingly firm and strong. Gurund Ritroon looked upon Djik'ri and found that he was worthy.

Then came the thrilling thing he had been waiting for. Mnir'ra, she of the dream-clouds of sky-blue hair, reached out and gently took his hand. When he felt that doll-like hand in his and saw her glowing smile and her moist, welcoming eyes, he felt some of the strength go out of his legs momentarily, and he was breathless.

"You are exceedingly fair," he said, as she kneeled and touched his hand to her forehead.

Then her dark eyes looked up again into his. She said nothing, but she smiled as she had before and his head swam. . . .

After a while, he began to be aware of what Djik'ri was saying to him:

"And of course we will rebuild the ancient temple. But first of all, I hope that it is your wish to aid us in our cause against the Bi'djar Ri, for this is the Season of Urg. I have pledged my life to resist the increasing pressure which has been brought to bear on us, and if you would lead my army against the superior forces of Gon'ri the Warrior, I stand ready to command them for you. But there is little time, if you would put into effect any plans of your own, for even today my sister must begin the task of selecting the victims of the sacrifice."

GURUND RITROON looked into Mnir'ra's eyes and saw tears. They were tears of sorrow, tears of dread, and tears of supplication. He looked for a long while in wondering silence at the two beautiful red people before him. And he struggled desper-

ately to find within himself the power to help them. Again came the unanswered question: What must a god do?

Then he remembered his other self, the Earthman, Flannigan. Flannigan, who had needed his god-self to reach the Lens. Now, beyond the Lens, the god needed the man, Flannigan. Flannigan, Master of Science. That was it! Superior knowledge! Therein lay his power!

A grim smile crept over the lips of Gurund Ritroon. He was getting ideas from the Outer Emptiness, from Flannigan, man of Earth.

"How many red men and how many green men are there?" he asked.

Djik'ri's brows furrowed as he wondered why a god should ask questions. But he hastened to reply. "Of red men there are many, about fifty thousand," he said. "We do not know the number of the Bi'djar Ri, since we have never been to their country—that is, and *returned*." . . .

"How many ships do they have?"

We do not know, as they bring only enough to carry back the victims of Urg. Although the last time I recall there were several extra ships full of armed warriors, including Gon'ri himself, who looked with too much interest upon our fair shores and wooded hills. Perhaps each time now he will send more ships until there will be a sufficient number to carry out an invasion."

Gurund Ritroon was getting an inspiration. His grim smile turned to one of enthusiasm. He looked at Mnir'ra.

"The young men and women whom you are going to select for the tribute of Urg will not have to go if they are willing to work for their own salvation," he said. "As you select them, send them to me. Also, send me as many others as you can, but in strict-

est secrecy. We have enemies, even in Serin-Gor. Surprise must be one of our weapons, but I will give you others. Djik'ri, you must stay here to help me, as much as you can. There is much you and your people will have to learn and do, and the time *is* short."

Djik'ri's face lighted with fierce elation. Mnir'ra's eyes again glistened with tears, this time out of joy and gratitude.

She reached out and took his hand once more. She kneeled before him and touched his hand to her forehead. Moved by an irresistible impulse, he reached out with his other hand and gently stroked her sky-blue hair, so fine it was even difficult to feel. On a further impulse, he pulled her to her feet and drew her close so that each was aware only of the other's eyes. She was so close that they touched, and her doll's body seemed vibrant, soft and warm. Then, as though it were inevitable, he kissed her on her forehead.

Djik'ri stared at him in open-mouthed amazement. Mnir'ra hastily withdrew, her shell-pink coloring deepening to rose red. She signalled goodbye to her brother and ran shyly toward the distant Ban'thorn. And in less than a minute she was galloping away into the woods, leaving Djik'ri alone with their strange new god.

Gurund Ritroon stood there, wondering if he had been motivated more by the god in him or the Irishman.

Djik'ri heard him mutter a great and powerful incantation. It was a cryptic, magic thing that he knew was not for his ears, and he turned respectfully away, even though the English language was incomprehensible to him.

For Gurund Ritroon waved his arms in the air and said aloud to himself, "What will she be thinking of you now, you blasted idiot! A fine god you're making yourself out to be—kissing leprechauns!"

CHAPTER IV

"Spears Shine Forth"

ZRAND'RI, High Priest of Gur, suspected that something was amiss. The citizens of Serin-Gor were a naive people who could not very well dissimulate. By their very secretiveness he knew that something of momentous proportions was brewing. As nothing of momentous proportions, other than Urg, had ever occurred in his memory, the thing was extraordinarily strange.

The more suspicious he became, the more he found that gave him cause for suspicion. He was aware of secret meetings behind closed doors, of lights burning in various windows until the small hours of the dawn. Services in the Temple of Gur were alarmingly reduced, even though the Season of Urg had always served to increase the attendance previously. Reports filtered in concerning the movement of large groups of people to the other side of Mag'dur. And where was Djikn Kinri the Hunter, who was soon to claim the throne from the regency of his sister? His absence lent particular significance to the unprecedented occurrences. Finally, when Zrand'ri saw crews of men erecting strange devices on the beaches as though in preparation against an invasion, he took action.

The small army of Serin-Gor existed merely as the result of ancient tradition. Complete lack of battle experience had always been a weakening factor as far as effectiveness was concerned, but at least it consisted of more than three thousand men, and they were reasonably disciplined. In latter years, since the death of old King Jith'loor, who had walked alone in Zi'ilgar-Lon to find eternal sleep after the accidental death of his wife,

Ank'torna, the Counselors of the Queen Regent had organized the management of the army temporarily under the priesthood of Gur, largely owing to Zrand'ri's own eloquent arguments, and thus the High Priest enjoyed the commanding generalship, a privilege which would end upon Djik'ri's maturity and his consequent acquisition to the throne. In the meantime, Djik'ri was a high officer in command of several regiments. But the army knew that Zrand'ri, for the time being, was the commanding general.

For this reason Zrand'ri called in one of his most trusted generals and said, "What is the meaning of building defenses without my orders? And where is Djikn Kinri?"

The man on the carpet was of a heavy, red complexion, a cruder type than most of the Serin Ni. He was Zrand'ri's closest confidant because their temperament was similar, and he had given his entire allegiance to the High Priest for purposes of personal advancement. Also, he despised Djik'ri because he knew that, although their ranks were equal, Djik'ri was the better man, and moreover he was soon to be king and would then take over the army command from Zrand'ri, his benefactor. It was a strong case of professional jealousy, and Zrand'ri knew he would like to see any possible obstacle placed in Djik'ri's path to keep him from becoming king.

"I am pleased to tell you," he said, "that I have been making a thorough investigation of this affair and I have gathered many very startling pieces of information. My report would have been made to you tomorrow, anyway, if you had not called me in. But I'm glad you did, because it's high time for action."

ZRAND'RI looked unimpressed. "You have told me nothing so

far," he admonished.

"Very well, I shall make my report. It seems that the Queen and General Djikn Kinri have put out a secret call for volunteers. They are uniting all of Djik'ri's companies and deserters from other units and all of General Djur Djinri's companies under one command and have also enlisted the group chosen for Urg into their work. They are working very secretly, because it appears that they wish to make as much progress with their plans as possible before you take action to oppose them, as they presume you will do in view of your position as High Priest, in charge of the Urg Law jurisdiction."

Zrand'ri's face darkened in rage at knowledge of this maneuver of Djik'ri's. "What is Djik'ri's objective in all this?" he asked, trying to control himself long enough to get the story straight.

The general watched his chief closely as he replied. "Djik'ri, on the Day of Urg, which is also the day when he becomes king, intends to abolish the Law of Urg by resisting the green men."

Zrand'ri's mouth dropped agape. His fierce eyes stared at his informer. "I knew," he said, "that Djik'ri was against the Law of Urg, but I did not know that he would have the courage or knowledge to move so soon. He is a fool! Does he not know that this defiance of Gon'ri the Warrior will precipitate a disastrous invasion upon us?"

"Now we come to the most astounding part of my report," replied the general. "Djik'ri has an ally."

"A *what*?"

"An ally. My agents have gone to the other side of Mag'dur, to the site of the ancient temples, and they have seen him."

"*Him*?" queried Zrand'ri, mystified.

"Do you mean that Djik'ri's ally only consists of one man?"

"Yes, but what a man! Perhaps you will appreciate what I mean when I tell you that they call him—Gurund Ritroon!"

Zrand'ri's eyes widened with sudden fear, and he staggered back, one hand raised before him as though to ward off a physical blow.

The name was self-explanatory—Gurund Ritroon, *Son of Gur, the Avenger!*

After a long moment of silence, Zrand'ri's face darkened with suspicion. "I do not believe it!" he said. "What does this imposter look like?"

Again the general watched Zrand'ri as he answered him. He, himself, wanted to know on which side lay the truth, for many strange things were happening. "He is taller than us, taller even than any green man," he said. "He is not of this world, for he is purest white and glistens like polished marble, and his hair is black, and his strength is the strength of a score of Zats. He speaks our language and says that he has come from the Outer Emptiness, from beyond the Lens."

ZRAND'RI was thinking fast. If the physical description were true, then he was truly not of this world. But where could he have come from? Had Gur actually sent the Avenger, after all? Zrand'ri had never really believed the old legend of the Lens.

"No!" he exclaimed in jealous rage. "He cannot be Gurund Ritroon! Gur would have notified me of his coming! If he be an emissary of any god, then he is an enemy in our midst, serving the bloody gods of the Bi'djar Ri in an attempt to undermine us. If he succeeds in deceiving our people, this can be the end of Serin-Gor! I must go and see him at once with my own

eyes!"

"I am at your service, Zrand'lir Nzinri," said the general.

"What is this...this false god's plan?" asked Zrand'ri concernedly. "What is he doing?"

"He has them all working," replied the other. "In the mountains they go searching for samples of unusual substances, and they are digging up the ground, taking out many things such as the black stone of fire, which the god-man calls 'co-al'. And there are great, glowing fires where another type of earth is melted down and a liquid substance comes out that, when hardened, becomes black metal. There are huge mill stones turned by many people, and the red, glowing metal is pressed by them into sheets, for shields and armor. They are making strange new weapons. There is one called 'Vee-One' which is a new type of bow with a strange metallic coil in it that can hurl fire brands at the enemy faster and farther than the arrows of the green men. For the first time this puts the Bi'djar Ri in *our* range before they can get close enough to shoot us, should they attempt to invade us one day."

"I see," said Zrand'ri, fuming. "And what are these contraptions they are erecting on the beaches?"

"They are called 'Vee-Two'." replied the general. "They consist of a series of huge catapults made of entire trees bound cleverly together. These will be used to throw huge rocks out to sea and sink the ships of the green men as they approach. I believe there is a variation of this called 'Vee-Three'. The god-man has sent people to bring back great jars of the black liquid of fire from the bubbling pools beyond Kild'rn, even from the edge of Zi'ilgar-Lon. Flaming cauldrons of this black fire liquid may also be hurled out to sea by means of the cata-

pults to smash into masts and sails of approaching ships and set them afire. Great is the knowledge and cleverness of this stranger."

"Hm-m-m. Very clever. And I suppose he has some other 'Vee' weapons in production?"

"Oh, many others which could not be sufficiently analyzed because of their strangeness and variety, and even those working on the projects did not understand the nature of what they were preparing. Some there are who cook and ferment plant and earth substances to produce searing acids which, when put to work in some strange way with the soft, heavy metal, *gus'drun*, and the black stone, *d'r'il*, produce a mysterious, invisible form of life that can bite without leaving a mark on you. And there is a black powder they have made which, when ignited, explodes with a blinding light and can tear down walls of stone. My men have even seen a strange thing that sears the sky with a streak of flame at night and lands afar in the forests, blasting trees and rocks asunder, like a thunderbolt of the gods. It is a powerful magic this god-man is giving them, but secrecy there is very great, and all but one of my spies were apprehended and killed. There is very high morale among Djik'ri's men, and he has several thousand civilians working for him also. Beyond Mag'dur the seashores and the hills and forests are loud with the sounds of unceasing labor, day and night. They have even rebuilt one of the ancient temples for this man-god to live in, and they have clothed him in the raiment of a great king, and they worship at his feet. It is truly a great deception of the people, as you say."

Zrand'ri's dark brows lowered in his frustration. He glared for a long while into space. Then, suddenly, he gave a command.

"Call in every army officer," he said, "who is loyal to Gur and who has the future safety and welfare of Serin-Gor at heart! This false god who has come among us has bewitched Djikn Kinri into believing that he is doing good for his country, when in reality he is playng right into the hands of the Bi'djar Ri, giving them a legitimate chance to invade us! What are these few new weapons against the unnumbered hordes of green men under Gon'ri the Warrior, whose armor is also of metal and whose ships can fill Ces'son Nar to the horizon, and whose heart is merciless for all the Serin Ni? There is no time to lose if we would save our country! Call the army to me! Tell them that I, Zrand'ri, proclaim this white giant to be an imposter! He comes not from Gur, but from the blood-hungry gods to whom our innocent youths are sacrificed! And he hungers only after more! He is after our destruction! If they love their country and if they care for Djik'ri or their queen, they will rescue them from their great delusion and oppose this stranger. Tell them that if they would see with a clear eye in this terrible moment of bewitchment they should cling to me, Zrand'ri, for I am not deceived! Go!"

EVEN TO A man more shrewd than the general, Zrand'ri would have been impressive, making this impassioned speech. The general left, half stumbling over himself to get out of the temple.

While Zrand'ri waited for the army chiefs to come to him, he climbed into the temple tower where he kept a strange pet. This was a huge black *Ieh'nu*, not indigenous to Serin-Gor, a secret gift given to him by none other than Gon'ri the Warrior in recognition of his Quisling allegiance. The *Ieh'nu* was a species of homing bird with a



GON'RI THE WARRIOR

serpent's head and deadly fangs, of great wingspread and an untiring strength. Gon'ri was taking no chances. He had been informed about Djikn Kinri's coming kingship and all about his strong temperament and resentment of the Law of Urg. Should anything unusual develop, the agreement was that he was to be warned ahead of time by means of the *Ieh'nu*.

The upper priesthood of both continents knew a sort of cuneiform symbolism which was akin to writing, by means of which they could transmit secret messages. Ztand'ri prepared such a message on the silky bark of the *kimblor* tree and rolled it up so that it would fit into a small wooden cylinder attached to the leg of the *Ieh'nu*. Once he had it well fastened in and secured, he released the great bird. It spread its somber wings and glided silently away over the Barrier Sea without the slightest hesitation. Zrand'ri watched it go, thinking of the cryptic message he had prepared:

*Spears shine forth;
Dark clouds appear;
The fortress is tall and thick....*

What this meant was that treachery was in the air and that Serin-Gor was preparing new weapons and was getting ready to resist. It also said that the resistance would be very strong, which meant that the Bi'djar Ri should come full armed for battle.

Thus did Zrand'ri try to earn his chance at the Quisling kingship of Serin-Gor, in case Gon'ri the Warrior's plan of conquest should be carried out.

Much smaller things than political intrigue oftentimes affect the course of history, however. One such small thing was Zrand'ri's belfry boy. He had been assigned the duty of feeding the *Ieh'nu*, and he had learned whence it

had come. When Zrand'ri released the weird creature, he made sure the boy was not present, but there was nothing to prevent the boy from seeing it from the hills of Rurz'tlid as it winged its way across the Barrier Sea. And much he wondered about Zrand'ri's purpose in releasing it....

GON'SR LIT'RI, known to fame as

Gon'ri the Warrior, was physically, politically and financially the most powerful green man on all the planet of Gra'ghr, which was not an inconsiderable achievement inasmuch as the land of Bi'djar-Tan consisted of a great continent teeming with hundreds of thousands of restless green men, all of them warlike, often fighting wars of their own against each other, galloping thousands strong across the deserts and mountains astride their fighting Ban'thorns, causing lesser kingdoms and principalities to rise and fall like the restless tides of Ces'son Nar. Many were the powerful chieftains who would have risen against Gon'ri had he not learned to rule them all with a hand more ruthless and merciless than their own.

In his sandals, he stood all of two feet in height. A love of rough sports and bloody experience in battle had given him a very powerful and impressive looking body. Like all of the Bi'djar Ri, he was as hairless as the carnivorous *karn-ger* cat that sat chained beside his throne, and a slight tendency to exude oily moisture from his skin kept his body glistening.

His habitual apparel consisted of a split skirt, open on each side, from the belt line down the thighs. The skirt was heavy with gold braid and weird, jeweled designs connected with his polytheistic religion. The belt he wore was a pure band of gold which supported, besides the skirt, a very long, jeweled fighting dagger. On each

powerful forearm he wore two bright bands of silver. They were kept in place by the size of his muscles and were there to remind him, should they ever slip, that he must keep his strength up to par.

A single scar located symmetrically between his brows added dramatic effect to his perpetual frown. Gon'ri had never been seen to smile or heard to laugh in his life. And small wonder. He had witnessed every live sacrifice in the capital since he was old enough to understand, which was thousands of years ago. But he was a great supporter of the sacrifices. Criminals were usually sacrificed, and the word "criminal" was taken to mean any and all enemies. Therefore the threat of the sacrifice gave him power. It gave the priesthood power, and the priesthood was his machine of state. It was a tradition, a way of life which was a part of the social structure of green-man civilization. The worship of their terrible stone gods and the live sacrifices were vital.

But with the growth of the population, which could not be curbed even by recourse to wars or sacrifices, there was a greater incidence of those who got ideas about overthrowing the system, not because they were loath to sacrifice whom they pleased, but because they, too, were hungry for power. So Gon'ri felt that he not only needed a greater source of victims for the sacrifice than that provided by the Law of Urg; he knew that it would be healthy also to satisfy the appetites of his stronger chieftains by initiating a campaign of conquest against the Serin Ni.

AS HE STOOD that evening at a window of his palace in the green-man city of Inis'dur, he gazed reflectively at the leaden, windy sky, the bleak stone buildings, and at the gray

granite cliff walls of the stony mountains beyond the city. He missed the sunny skies of Serin-Gor, and its green wooded hills and sparkling streams and flowered plains, and he longed for the arrival of the time to make the journey to pick up the sacrifice victims on the Day of Urg. Just as he ached with inaction, so did the whole nation. Somehow the action must be provided. His desires fought with superstition in his dark soul. Would Gur fall upon him, after all, for breaking the old commandment? Or was the story of the Lens but the fiction of the red men, to save their skins? He had always scorned the ancient legend outwardly, and in his heart he had tried to.

At that moment, a priest entered the room and came to his side, excitedly. He, too, was a bald, oil-exuding green man, but of much smaller stature and of a much more slender build. On his forehead dangled the emerald symbol of his priestly station, meaning that he was one of the dreaded Sacrificers.

"Gon'ri!" he exclaimed, holding out to him a curious scroll of tree bark. "This is amazing news!"

The ruler of the Bi'djar Ri, without change of expression, turned and took the bark. He unrolled it and looked at the cryptic ideograms drawn there. "What does it say?" he asked. "Where did you get it?"

The wiry priest could hardly contain his elation. "Your last question should be answered first," he said. "It comes from our good friend Zrand'ri of Serin-Gor, brought by the *Ieh'nu* you gave him!"

Gon'ri tensed, outwardly subduing his excitement. He grasped the priest's arm in a painful grip, while he gave him back the bark scroll. "Read this!" he commanded.

The priest paraphrased the symbols

expertly. "Zrand'ri wishes to advise that the people of Serin-Gor are gathering together to resist us on the next Day of Urg. There is much secret activity and preparation of new and powerful weapons. He further states that in his own opinion we should be careful because the resistance is going to be strong."

"Ha!" cried Gon'ri, showing his white teeth without smiling in his high elation. "The red men are taking the first step to break the ancient pact! We offered them peace and freedom in return for obedience to the Law of Urg. Now if they resist us they free our hands! We may attack at will!"

"You are right!" replied the priest. "This is evidence enough, because it comes on the personal authority of Gur's own High Priest. It is an official declaration that the treaty of Urg is being broken. Therefore, it is your solemn duty to invade!"

GON'RI WAS moved to smile, but instead he staggered with the effort of self-composure. He went over to a stone bench and sat down to get a grip on himself. Still he did not smile, and his scarred frown only deepened.

"I hope," he said, "that those song-birds will be able to put up enough resistance to make it interesting for us. The war chieftains of Bi'djar-Tan are restless and filled with a fierce appetite for physical activity. This must satisfy them. Call in my Counselors of War!" he ordered. "I want to assemble our local naval forces and the regular army for a surprise attack, well before they expect us!"

When the excited priest hurried out of the chamber, Gon'ri got up and walked meditatively under a low arch that gave access to his throne room, and for the first time there was the slightest suggestion of a cold smile about his lips.

On the low dais, beside the throne, sat Wur'lun, his great, hairless *karn-ger* cat. He yawned, showing three rows of shark-like teeth in his cavernous, toad-shaped mouth, and his three ruby-red eyes blinked at his master sleepily. The largest, most powerful and deadly carnivore on the planet, capable even of handling several Zats at a time, he was the king of beasts, and apparently he considered it quite appropriate to lie on the throne dais of Gra'ghr's green-man emperor.

Gon'ri walked over to a large stone table that stood below the throne. On it rested a fresh cageful of *lur'lurs*, furry white, rabbit-like creatures that squealed in terror every time that Wur'lun moved.

Gon'ri stared at the *karn-ger* cat. "What do you think, Wur'lun?" he said. "The red-skinned minstrels think they can fight! So that means we move upon them!" The scar between his brows grew dark with shadow and the suggestion of a smile on his lips stiffened into a contemptuous sneer. "And Zrand'ri would be my puppet king of Serin-Gor! Pah!" He opened the cage and extracted a squealing *lur'lur*. He held it in his arm and stroked it reassuringly until it calmed down. "I'll be emperor of Gra'ghr," he said to Wur'lun, who watched the *lur'lur* intently. "And I'll rule from sunny Rurz'tlid by the River Toor, where Mnir'ra the Singer will sing—and swim—for my personal entertainment."

Wur'lun filled the throne room with a reverberating growl, and Gon'ri raised an eyebrow at him. "What of Djikn Kinri the Hunter?" he asked. In the same instant he cracked the spine of the *lur'lur* so that it was crippled, and he tossed it to his pet. "A good question, Wur'lun—and there is your answer!"

At last, Gon'ri the Warrior smiled, as he watched the *karn-ger* cat eager-

ly devour the broken and bleeding animal. But it was a cold smile of lofty amusement....

CHAPTER V

The Irish in Him

GURUND RITROON had to admire the red men. They had not even discovered, as yet, the principle of the wheel, yet they took remarkably to his production methods and proved to be really constructive.

The whole shoreline for the distance of a mile from his rebuilt temple was an open-air factory and armed camp. He had the Serin Ni divided into specific work groups and progressive training units, under Djik'ri's able generalship and that of his friend, Djur Djini. Even little Mnir'ra had settled here for a while. Gurund Ritroon's encouraging plan had inspired her to finish her previously odious task of selecting the victims of Urg. They were all selected in record time and were there on the beach breaking production records, for they worked for their own salvation.

Group One had graduated back to Rurz'tlid, where they were building Vee Twos, the catapults for coastal defense. This project was already in the finishing stages and the coast artillery units of the army had already been selected and trained to man these weapons.

Group Two was still busy advancing the project on Vee One—cross-bows. He, himself, tempered the metal and turned out the springs and the red men manufactured the wooden parts and the metal-tipped arrows and the oil-dipped fire brands. Over five hundred Vee Ones were already in the hands of Djik'ri's infantry.

Group Three was working on chest armor and metal shields, and most of the bowmen were already equipped.

He kept Djur Djinri busy training infantry in defense and commando tactics, using crossbows, spears, spiked bludgeons, in closed and open fighting, and even in judo.

Strategic Group Four was split into two sections. One did his coal and iron mining and brought him natural oil and sulphur and saltpeter and made charcoal, while the other section made use of the ingredients thus supplied.

Group Five was under strict secrecy. They were putting together his major Vee-weapons under his personal supervision, but he doubted that he could get these latter ready in time to be effective for the first attack by Gon'ri the Warrior. They all knew now, thanks to Zrand'ri's belfry boy, that the green men had probably been tipped off ahead of time, and that the battle might begin well before the Day of Urg. The least Gurund Ritroon hoped for was that the green men's first assault would be driven back, and that Gon'ri's subsequent preparations for a major invasion would then give him a chance to set up his major weapons. These latter were complicated, and he was handicapped for want of time and suitable materials, but at least he had gunpowder, a small supply of crude copper wire, and wet cell batteries, a few makeshift vibrators and spark coils. He doubted that he could do all he hoped to do, but he was determined to try—and he was teaching Djik'ri as fast as the bewildered little red warrior could take it....

"WE CANNOT express our gratitude to you," Djik'ri told him one night before the Day of Urg. "You are changing the destiny of a planet."

Gurund Ritroon was standing over a crude anvil, sweating over the task of fashioning two halves of a hollow

iron ball. This was Vee Ten, the nature of which Djik'ri understood, thanks to his teaching.

"We cannot allow ourselves to be overconfident," he cautioned, tossing a mop of dark hair off his forehead. "Your army is divided. Zrand'ri seems to be producing some effective counter-propaganda, and many units have remained under his command. Having a split army at this time is not good."

Djik'ri smiled confidently. "With our superior weapons we could repel the Bi'djar Ri with half our number."

"Let us not be too sure of ourselves," retorted Gurund Ritroon. "Treachery behind your back, while you are fighting for your life is a deadly handicap, often a fatal one. You must make every effort to unify the armed forces of Serin-Gor."

"But Zrand'ri has convinced many of them that you are an emissary of the enemy gods, and that you seek to deceive us," replied Djik'ri. "He, too, can appeal to the men on the basis of patriotism and loyalty, as well as the fear of breaking the Law of Urg. What we are doing, you know, serves to justify a green-man invasion, according to the terms of the ancient pact."

"Djik'ri," said Gurund Ritroon. "Are you, too, torn by doubts? Are you unsure of yourself?" Then he regretted that he had said this, for when he looked at Djik'ri he saw such an expression of hurt pride as he had never witnessed before, in this land or in the world of the Earthman, Flannigan.

Djik'ri became rigid. He turned without a word and stomped out of the workshop.

"Wait!" said Gurund Ritroon, dropping his work.

He overtook Djik'ri on the broken steps of one of the temple ruins. Several hard-working red men had paused to witness the scene. Their young king-



to-be stood stiffly and coldly determined, one hand on the handle of his knife. His black eyes blazed into Gurund Ritroon's.

"I can't have even you accuse me of indecision or cowardice!" he said. "I want you to know that even without your help I should have defied the Bi'djar Ri!" With this he turned on his heel and walked away.

Gurund Ritroon was so chagrined over this incident that he could do no more work that night. He was as fond of 'Djik'ri as he might have been of his own brother. In fact, he was proud of him. But now he had offended him and he felt, in his god-loneliness, that he had lost a much-needed friend.

He walked down to a secluded spot on the beach, away from the large red-man camp and their fires. He sat down on the still warm sand and looked out to sea. Flannigan, the human shadow within him, was in control of his emotions this night, and he allowed the human alchemy of desire to undermine an otherwise cosmic perspective. Gurund Ritroon was humanly lonely now, which was quite different from god-loneliness.

LAN BA'NA was moving swiftly, almost perceptibly, toward the horizon of Ces'son Nar, casting a peculiarly golden moonpath on the waters. And Ral, the purple moon, lagged behind, farther up in the sky. The whole scene provided an unearthly beauty which stirred embers of memory in the man Flannigan which had been all but forgotten by his race. This was true enchantment. He did not have to imagine he was in wonderland. He was.

As the camp settled down for the night, sounds diminished to the point where the soft singing of the bards predominated in the cool, moonlit night. As an Earthman, he had heard that saddest of all musical instruments,

the Quichuan *quena* of the Peruvian Andes, but this singing of the bards of Serin-Gor outclassed the *quena*. Sometimes the intricately harmonized notes quivered through him like an invisible current, shaping his mind and heart irresistibly to their mood.

Then he was suddenly startled to hear, somewhere close to him, the fairy singing of a red woman:

*Whither has my lost love gone?
Altinra, she of laughter,
She whose eyes were like the dawn
Where night embraces day...*

He tensed, uncontrollably. This was the old song, the song that had connected him to his strange destiny. At last, here was the Singer, the one who knew the other verse! With an awareness of destiny being fulfilled, he listened for the rest of it, the other part that he had never been able to quite recall before...

*She who sings no more of me,
Who walks into Eternity,
Taking only memory
Of love, like blossoms, withered.*

*Why, my love, is fate so cold,
To fill the heart in vain,
Giving today to have and hold,
Only to lose again?
Meaning dies and beauty's left
Alone in desert's waste.
O leave me not of thee bereft!
I follow thee in haste!*

Gurund Ritroon got to his feet. He looked into the darkness in the direction of the singing, and he became aware of an approaching figure. It was a woman, one of the perfectly formed little red women. He thought he knew who it was, but he knew certainly that whoever it was he had waited to find her throughout an eternity.

And then his heart gave a great leap, because it was the one he had hoped it would be—Mnir'ra, distant daughter of Altinra!

She came wearing white flowers in her hair. Her perfect little feet, like those of a miniature pink porcelain gazelle, were bare. She wore only a cool, split skirt, open down the thighs. Traditionally, she wore nothing above her waist but her own beauty. To both his god senses and his human senses she was a treat to the tranquillity of his soul. He was not only irretrievably cast away into "an alien sphere of existence; he was impossibly in love with a leprechaun!

"Gurund Ritroon!" she called to him, in a happy tone of voice. "How wonderful it is to find you alone!"

"You took the words out of my mouth," he translated the Earthman's emotions into Gra'ghorian speech. "What are you doing here?"

"I came hoping to find you," she said. She had reached his side now and she placed one small hand on his arm as she looked up with a glowing smile into his face.

TO ALL her intoxicating, elfin beauty she had added the scent of an exotic perfume—some sort of flower oil with which she had bathed her entire body so that it glistened softly in the moonlight.

Gurund Ritroon's head swam. Every ounce of manhood in him urged him to take her up in his arms and tell her she had to belong to him. But something troubled the god in him. It was the memory of another love, Altinra, who walked alone in Zi'lgar-lon, the Desert of Death. Was this the price she had paid for loving a god? And then he knew why. As a god, he had a mission to fulfill. After a while, the Lens would take him back again into the Outer Emptiness, and Mnir'ra,

if she loved him, would also walk alone where Altinra had gone in ages past. If he had been only a man, perhaps, yes, but the Son of Gur had a mission to fulfill. To think of himself now would be to destroy the object of his love. He could not permit this to happen.

"Gurund Ritroon," she said softly.

"Yes?"

"Please take me in your arms and hold me."

This request hit him like a thunderbolt. He looked at her with widened eyes. "Hold you?" he gasped. "Why?"

"Because I love you."

His brain whirled. Impossible world; impossible love. But here it was.

He made a herculean effort to control himself, but desire suddenly flattened his inhibitions like a tidal wave crashing through a village of paper dolls, and he swept her into his arms. If her doll-like body had been warm and vibrant before, right now it was a maddening flame!

He kissed her on her lips, while her arms went around his neck, and where their hearts had glowed before, now they melted.

"How can I help myself?" he muttered aloud in English. Then he said to her, "We have to figure this thing out before it is too late. How can we two love each other?"

She only smiled in dreamy happiness as she passed a warm hand over the great square of his chest. "Isn't it already too late to question how or why?" she answered.

"Yes. I mean—but I am not of your world."

Mnir'ra looked at him suddenly with deep understanding. "I know, my dearest," she said. "You are Gurund Ritroon, a god. You are not human." She thought for a moment that the god trembled with resentment at that remark, but it was not the god. It was

the Irishman. "Still," she continued, "I remember Altinra, and it seems that I was born waiting for you. I could never love another, and it is better, therefore, that I should love you while you are here and then lose you forever, than never love you at all. I can only love you, beloved. I want to belong, and to be loved, even if you are a god. I know your love has waited for me whole ages in the Outer Emptiness, and so that is why I entrust my love to you."

He set her on the ground. "Let me take you back to camp," he said, almost tonelessly. "I love you, yes. How could I ever deny it? But beyond our happiness lies great pain, and I'm asking you if it's worth it? You must sleep on this problem, Mnir'ra."

But Mnir'ra stamped her foot on the ground in sudden anger. "I'll have you know that not even Gurund Ritroon, if that's who you really are, can deny the love offer of Mnir'ra Nikin'ra! I have offered myself to you to own and love as a wife, but now I will see you come crawling to me before I will even think of it again!"

"But Mnir'ra, I—"

"Good night!" she cried bitterly. And she ran away like a little wild animal, her incredible hair floating behind her.

Gurund Ritroon stood still and held both his temples. "Ye gods!" he exclaimed in English. "Two-time loser in one night! Now they're both mad!"

Ruefully, and with many conflicting emotions raging within him, he turned back toward his temple dwelling, where Djik'ri also slept, with the intention of going to bed. However, had he been aware of a thousand or so pairs of hostile eyes peering at him from the woods over the dead bodies of a score of sentinels, he might have slept that night even less than he did.

CHAPTER VI

Civil War

THE RED men slept peacefully within sight of the new Temple of Gur, which was the symbol of their new-found hope. But there were other red men, in the bordering forest, who regarded the temple as a threat to their very existence, for Zrand'ri's appeal to superstition had turned more than half the army to his side.

Zrand'ri himself was present at the head of this silent army, mounted on a Ban'thorn, surveying the camp in company with the dark redskin who had first reported to him concerning these strange activities.

So far, his plan was working satisfactorily. The major portion of the army was his, he had sent his message in time to Gon'sr Lit'ri, and if he were any judge of the green warrior, he knew that there would soon be warships riding the Barrier Sea. And here, to complete his luck, was a sleeping camp, sentinels all taken care of, and the god-man where he wanted him—inside the temple along with Djikn Kinri, who slept there also, according to Zrand'ri's spies.

"The Queen," he whispered to his general. "She sleeps within the camp this night?"

"I am informed," said the general, "that for some reason unknown to us she started back toward Rurz'tlid tonight with a company of guards."

"You are...ah...taking care of that situation?"

"Yes, your Holiness."

Zrand'ri grinned in triumph. "Good!" he said. "Then proceed at once with orders one and two!"

The general saluted. He signalled to a nearby aide, and the latter raised a long, slender tube to his lips and

produced a thin, high, piping sound. As this faint sound reached the ears of the army surrounding him, about one thousand shielded spearmen moved resolutely out upon the beach toward their sleeping countrymen.

Then the general's aide piped again, this time twice in succession. At this signal, a special task force of men heavily laden with special equipment moved in frantic haste toward the newly constructed temple.

DJUR DJINRI was a very conscientious general, a man capable of taking care of his responsibilities. It is owing to such chance virtues as this in times of epic emergency among all civilizations that great national tragedies have been circumvented with only seconds to spare. A hundred generations of red men on the planet Gra'ghr were to revere the memory of Djur Djinri because, besides being a good general, he was a light sleeper as well.

He had heard the gurgling, muffled cry of the last sentinel as he had died at the hands of Zrand'ri's men. Wisely, he did not leap to his feet and cry an alarm, as he knew well the size of the total army, and his own small force of eight hundred men told him that Zrand'ri had about twenty-two hundred at his disposal. Some would naturally be in Rurz'tlid, but there could well be fifteen hundred here, if his suspicions were verified that a major attack was about to start.

Suddenly, campfire light reflected from a score of spears in the woods, and he knew beyond all shadow of a doubt that the worst had come. By mortal struggle, the men of Serin-Gor were about to weaken themselves in the face of imminent warfare with the Bi'djar Ri.

He weighed the possibilities and consequences swiftly in his mind. If Zrand'ri won, there would possibly

even be no Gurund Ritroon to help them against the green men, and no Vee-weapons. This preparation for resistance which had already been made evident would, he knew, precipitate the dreaded green-man invasion upon Serin-Gor and find them unprepared. A small boy who worked in the temple had brought a message to Djik'ri that, seven days ago, Zrand'ri had communicated with Gon'ri the Warrior by means of a *Ieh'nu*. This would bring the green-man hordes upon them at any hour. The red men, if caught with divided forces now, would lose, to become slaves to the green men forever!

Like a flash of divine inspiration the thought came to Djur Djinri that here, in this hour, the destiny of a world might be decided. Gurund Ritroon was asleep in the temple, as was Djikn Kinri. He had no way of awakening them, and Zrand'ri might trap them there by barricading the door and windows. Plainly then, the work of salvation rested upon his own shoulders!

Quietly, the general pulled on his armor and checked up on his new crossbow and metal-tipped arrows. At the same time he nudged his neighbor, a blissfully slumbering captain.

"Pass the word along," he said. "But whisper it. Let not a man speak aloud under penalty of death. We are about to be attacked. Get armor and crossbows ready and prepare to execute maneuver three."

By the time Zrand'ri's men stepped onto the beach, many hundreds of Djur Djinri's men were ready, and others were getting ready, as quietly and unobtrusively as possible.

"The camp's awake!" cried one invader inadvisedly. For his trouble he received a spear in his back, and he was through with speaking forever.

"Attack!" cried Zrand'ri's general, and the invaders hurled their spears

at a wall of armored men rising up from the sands.

THE SPEARS bounced off of metal shields and chest armor, while strange, powerful bows shot metal-tipped arrows at them with lightning speed. It was that first counterblow which saved everything, because it withered the invader's ranks enough to equalize the numbers on each side.

From there on it was hand to hand and spear to spear. And many of Djur Djinri's men were still taken by surprise, not having had ample time to prepare themselves. But in the confusion the major portion of armored men were able to escape into the forest, leaving an almost empty camp to Zrand'ri. He could only boast of less than two hundred enemy dead, wounded and captured.

The men under Djur Djinri became Gra'ghr's first guerrilla fighters. With firm purpose, Djur Djinri gathered them together in strategic groups and dispersed them again with a definite plan of action.

"We must remain free," he told them, "to man the coast defenses when Gon'ri comes. Our forces are small, and we may not be led by Gurund Ritroon or Djik'ri, because I believe they were trapped inside the temple, but with what Gurund Ritroon has given us we may be able to turn Gon'ri back for more reinforcements. By the time he returns, Gurund Ritroon may be free. In the meantime, we must also keep Mnir'sr Nikin'ra in mind. Zrand'ri may wish to capture her and take the throne. Therefore, follow these orders. One: Do not form larger groups than a platoon until you hear the password, which is—*Urg!* When that comes, all converge immediately on the beach defenses at Rurz'tlid and defend your country to the death! Two: In the

meantime, stay hidden and well dispersed in the hills surrounding Rurz'tlid. Three: Try to capture officers and men out of the opposition forces under Zrand'ri and convince them that they must join us. Explain our side of the question by saying that we have proof that Zrand'ri is a traitor. He has sent a message to Gon'ri by means of a *Iek'nu* which Gon'ri gave him for that purpose. This means we are in imminent danger of attack, and therefore we must all unite! It is only Zrand'ri who wishes to divide us, because he wants the throne. Djik'ri and Mnir'ra have sworn to me that Gurund Ritroon is genuine, for he came in direct response to their prayers to Gur. Tell them not to become traitors, but to protect their queen and country and follow the banner of Freedom which we have set before us."

The guerrillas actually made a banner that night. It was white, emblazoned with a menacing looking cross-bow and metal-tipped arrow. By morning there were several to unfurl in case sails were sighted on the Barrier Sea....

GURUND RITROON was awakened by Djik'ri, in the temple.

"Wake up!" he shouted. In the light of the torch he held in his hand, Gurund Ritroon observed that his previous expression of proud indignation had been supplanted by one of genuine consternation. "The camp has been wiped out!" he exclaimed. "We're trapped! They've barricaded the door and windows! Zrand'ri's men are outside, his own special guard. You've got to get us out of here! Do you know what this means? Gon'ri the Warrior will invade this country at any hour now and the new defenses will not be manned! Many of the new weapons are stored here in the temple. In spite

of all your planning we may be wiped out—conquered! And since I know Zrand'ri wants the throne, he has probably taken Mnir'ra!"

Gurund Ritroon took a great, deep breath and got to his feet. "Mnir'ra? Taken by Zrand'ri?" he said in a rumbling voice. His brows came close together, lowering over narrowed blue eyes. The marble whiteness of his face darkened, and knots of stubborn muscle lifted along his jaws. Now he *was* Son of Gur, the Avenger, and to his godly strength was added the flaming temper of an Irishman.

"Let's get out of here," he said between his clenched teeth.

"But that's just it!" complained Djik'ri. "We can't get out! They've barricaded everything! And outside are about five hundred of Zrand'ri's men just hoping we'll try to come out into the open!"

"I don't give a damn about those little runts!" Gurund Ritroon broke unconsciously into English. "I want to get out of here! That's all I ask!"

He placed his shoulder to the heavy wooden doors of the temple and heaved mightily. Under the terrific pressure, the thick timbers splintered, but beyond were tons of sandbags and boulders, braced by more timbers. Sweat and strain as he might, he found the barricade too heavy to be moved.

"Great Gur!" moaned Djik'ri. "Why should I be imprisoned like this! Please, Gurund Ritroon! If you are Son of Gur, the Avenger, you must get us out of here!"

The god-man sensed Djik'ri's deep anguish and mortification. For a leader like Djik'ri to be caught in a spot like this at a time of national emergency, he knew, was maddening. He was troubled enough by his own sense of urgency.

"The powder!" exclaimed Djik'ri.

"We can blast our way out!"

Gurund Ritroon shook his head. "I could, perhaps, but the size of blast it would take for that barricade might kill you."

"Then let's try the windows!"

"Those niches are too narrow for me, but you might be able to get through one of them." Gurund Ritroon jerked loose one of the heavy timbers sticking out of the shattered door of the temple. He used this as a battering ram, through one of the side window niches. Soon he had crashed through the outside timbers of the smaller barricade, and the pale light of dawn filtered in to them. In their field of vision was the vine-grown side of the steep bluff beside which the temple had been built.

"You could get through that," he told Djik'ri, "but you'd probably be captured."

"One of us must get through and make contact with any survivors who might still be on our side. They must be rounded up to man the beach defenses at Rurz'tlid!" Djik'ri prepared to go through the window. "Once I contact those who are loyal to the throne, I know I can win over a lot of the others from Zrand'ri. It has to be done quickly, because even at this minute there may be sails on Ces'son Nar!"

Gurund Ritroon looked appreciatively at the little red warrior. "All right, Djik'ri," he said. "But don't worry about me. I'll take care of myself. And I'll see you soon."

"But if you go through the front, you'll expose yourself to Zrand'ri's crack troops, and many of them are armed with Vee Ones!"

Gurund Ritroon glared at Djik'ri. "Have you forgotten who I am?" he asked, booming. "You forget that the outcome of this struggle was written eons ago. I am the Avenger! Now,

have faith, and go!"

WITHOUT another word, Djik'ri climbed into the window niche and pulled himself through. Gurund Ritroon watched him closely as he began to scale the bluff outside.

Then, suddenly, he saw Djik'ri stiffen and throw his head back in pain. A metal-tipped arrow, shot from a cross-bow, had neatly pinned him in the back. He bent over backward, struggled to reach the arrow with one free hand, and then fainted, tumbling down out of sight.

Gurund Ritroon watched speechlessly. He looked stonily through the window niche at a sharp tree root that protruded from the bluff. It dripped Djik'ri's blood. In the brightening dawn light, each drop seemed to be a priceless ruby.

Outside he heard shouts of triumph from Zrand'ri's guards as they scampered toward the temple to claim Djik'ri's body. Gurund Ritroon's fists clenched. There were many solemn things he swore he would accomplish this day.

In less than five seconds he had a long wooden bench up-ended against the temple door. He sprang on top of it and looked through the window niche there. This was too small even for Djik'ri's body, and it was not barricaded. Through it he could see hundreds of red men running in his direction up the beach, brandishing spears, cross-bows and metal shields. In his hand he held Gra'ghr's first version of the bazooka. Grimly, he thrust it through the niche and fired, point blank, at the oncoming men.

Then he was stayed at the sight of the sudden carnage wrought. Twenty of them died instantly, half ripped apart. Others rolled about in bloody agony. Many turned and ran while others groveled on the sand in abject terror. Never in the history of their

world had such a weapon been seen or heard. To them it was a thunderbolt of the gods.

After all, thought Gurund Ritroon, these were Mnir'ra's and Djik'ri's people, even if they were revolutionists. He'd have to control his temper and spare them as much as he could, even if the little devils had killed the best man they had—their own king, who might have been their greatest—

"Djik'ri!" he moaned, fighting back the moisture in his eyes. "You poor, brave little leprechaun! They got you in the back!"

After that one bazooka shot, he got busy. There was the matter of blasting his way out of the temple. He loaded the inner side of the barricade, behind the splintered door timbers, with metal containers of powder and attached a home-made fuse. With Djik'ri's torch he ignited it. And then he ran to the far end of the temple, up on the altar, where rested a facsimile of the legendary Lens. He held his ears, hoping that his densified frame could withstand the concussion....

CHAPTER VII

The First Invasion

THAT SAME morning, Djur Djinri's tired guerrillas espied with dismay a great fleet of green-man ships sailing down upon Rurz'tlid. Never had such a force of green men been seen before—fully thirty vessels crammed with warriors. There would be an average of three thousand men on those formidable vessels! And the only body of red men really disposed to resist them numbered six hundred!

Undaunted, General Djur Djinri passed the word along.

"Urg!" "Urg!" "Urg!" sounded the cries of action through the forests

above the flowered plain of Raj'dur. Many a bugler lifted the shrill *grin'duir* gourd to his lips and startled the citizens and the garrison below. From the city, men and women looked up in astonishment to see a small army of six hundred armored men running down upon them, carrying a number of white banners before them. These banners carried the picture of a strange new weapon, that which they brandished in their hands.

Zrand'ri's men quickly organized to resist. There were about a thousand present in the city's garrison. But Djur Djinri's archers, dropping in long lines to their knees to take aim and fire, withered their ranks with cross-bow shots long before they came in range of the defenders' ordinary bows. The spearmen rushed for cover in confusion, as did the common citizenry. All were amazed, terrified and bewildered, trying to analyze their precarious predicament and weigh values.

They knew their country was about to be invaded by a dreaded foe, and these brave fighters from the hills seemed to be disposed and equipped to make a defensive stand. Yet Zrand'ri's men opposed the defenders of Serin-Gor!

By the time Djur Djinri's forces gained the city's outskirts, they found Zrand'ri's men and many of the citizens joining their ranks and fighting off the waning opposition.

"Follow the banner of Freedom!" cried the guerrillas. "Zrand'ri the traitor brought Gon'ri upon us! He has captured Mnir'ra and seeks the throne for himself! Down with Zrand'ri! Fight for the Queen and Djikn Kinri—and Gurund Ritroon!"

Zrand'ri, fuming from his temple tower, shot orders at his remaining officers. "Tell them that Gur forbids this sacrilege!" he shouted. "They struggle in vain against a destiny that

is written! They must cease all resistance at once!"

But by the time the guerrillas reached the beaches the whole army, with the exception of a few of Zrand'ri's special guards, was with the defenders.

"Down with Zrand'ri!" they shouted. "Long live the Queen! Long live King Djik'ri! Long live Serin-Gor!"

GON'RI THE WARRIOR, from the crow's nest of his flagship, trained his keen eyes upon the distant shoreline and estimated that only about two thousand fighters were there to oppose him.

"I am highly disappointed," he said to his chief adjutant who stood in the crow's nest beside him. "The resistance is less than I thought it would be. However, that is due, no doubt, to Zrand'ri's good work. In a way, I suppose I should consider him for a small reward of some sort."

"I see some fighting around the Temple of Gur," remarked the adjutant. "Zrand'ri must be holding out there."

"It means, no doubt, that he is holding Queen Mnir'ra there. He promised me the Queen in exchange for the throne of Serin-Gor. Make the temple objective number one instead of the palace. Now, you'd better get back on the bridge because we'll soon have them in range of our bows. We want to give them our best volleys before we get within range of their weaker fire."

The adjutant suddenly grasped Gon'ri's arm and pointed at the sky. "Look!" he exclaimed.

And Gon'ri looked. He saw hundreds of long, thin lines tracing their way toward his ships, as though some herculean force had thrown out hawsers to them.

"What is it?" he queried.

"Those are trails of smoke!" cried the adjutant. "Arrows carrying fire! A brilliant weapon, but where did they get it?"

"I find this not so entertaining," frowned Gon'ri. "Signal all ships full sail ahead! We must get on land among those minstrels before they set us all on fire! How do they have a superior range?"

"New type of bow, sire! It looks like you'll get the kind of resistance you wanted! With your permission, I'll go to my station at once!"

The adjutant nimbly slithered down the rigging instead of using the mast ladder. For it was obvious that a serious emergency had arisen. Some of the ships were already throwing up clouds of smoke and flame, their compliments of fighters leaping into the sea.

"Full sail ahead!" shouted Gon'ri from the crow's nest. "All bowmen at stations! Get in range! Full volley! I'll have the head of the bowman who fails to find his mark!"

Filled with excitement and wonderment, keen to the scent of battle in the midst of smoke and flame, the powerful green bowmen crowded the forward gunwhales of the full-canvassed ships and held their arrows aimed for the command to fire. Some ships, heavily gutted by flame, were falling behind and wallowing crosswind in the path of others. Suddenly, metal-tipped arrows of death sprang from the shoreline with unforeseen velocity and decimated the ranks of Gon'ri's prize bowmen before they could fire. Scores fell into the sea, clutching at deeply imbedded arrows in hearts and throats and bellies.

"Full speed! Full speed!" shrieked Gon'ri. He had only twenty ships left in the running. Fully ten ships had lost speed because of burning sails. One was capsizing.

BUT JUST as the still formidable fleet brought the red men within range of the green men's bows, a new weapon was brought into play. Not much attention had been given by the enemy to about fifty strange structures lined up along the beaches for about one mile. These looked like tree trunks tied together and bent over by the wind.

Suddenly, these batteries of tree-trunks straightened up in many places, and as they did they hurled huge boulders or flaming cauldrons into the sky. Being released at close range over closely riding ships, the percentage of hits was high. The great ponderous rocks came crashing through masts and sails and men, shattering the decks and in some cases going through the hulls. The flaming cauldrons shattered, spewing flame and destruction wherever they hit. Two ships floundered. Four more were incapacitated with rigging down.

"Faster!" shrieked Gon'ri. "Drive into the shore!"

Then the red men hit the ships with a huge volley of new fire brands. And they again withered the ranks of the green men with crossbow fire. They also released more catapults. Men died on the decks and in the sea. More sails went up in flame. Clouds of boulders and flaming cauldrons descended upon the attackers.

And so it was that, of three thousand battle-hungry green men, only about fifteen hundred succeeded in getting their feet on shore that day. But once on shore, engaged in hand to hand combat, they changed the aspect of the struggle somewhat. For in spite of a sprinkling of armor among the defenders, and in spite of some good archery and spearing and bludgeoning, the green men were larger and stronger, and they pushed their advantage.

Led by Gon'ri himself, one large group pushed rapidly toward the temple to take the Queen....

Djur Djinri's hands were tied with the main defenses of the city, but he was vividly aware of the spearhead that was approaching the temple. Green men and red men dueled with spears and bludgeons. Since metal work on Gra'ghr was still in its infancy, swords were unknown. The spear dueling was a spectacular activity which held a double threat for the weaker contestant. One could go down with a split skull from the hard blow of a spear shaft as well as a pierced abdomen. And it was noisy. Thousands of shafts clattered and banged in the streets of Rurz'tlid, and many a red man was transfixed by a powerfully driven spear. The majority of green men who lay dead had been reached by sniping bowmen from the rooftops.

As best he could, Djur Djinri fought his way toward the temple, forced by the menacing circumstances to leave his station in the hands of lesser officers. Gon'ri's group was close to establishing contact with Zrand'ri's special guards. Fearing that he would not arrive in time to avert the capture of the Queen, Djur Djinri ducked down a side alley, intent upon following a special short cut.

WHEN GON'RI finally did gain the temple, he lost no time in getting down to business. Zrand'ri received him with a triumphant smile, although a worried shadow lingered about his dark eyes. Around his neck was a silver chain which supported a sort of holy water dispenser that dangled against his chest. He was in full regalia for an official visit.

"You have broken the resistance!" he said to Gon'ri. "Hail the ruler of Gra'ghr!"

"Never mind the ceremony,

Zrand'ri," barked Gon'ri. "Where is the Queen? We've got to get out of here! Why didn't you tell us about these new weapons? Do you realize we came near to being defeated? Of course I shall return to Bi'djar-Tan to assemble a fleet ten times as large and bring thirty thousand fighters, and I will exterminate every living red man in payment for this day, but you I shall hold especially to blame!"

Zrand'ri's smile quickly faded and his eyes flashed sudden defiance as he backed down the temple aisle toward the Lens-altar of Gur. He fingered the dispenser on his chest nervously. "I have served you well, Gon'ri!" he exclaimed. "Now I want the throne of Serin-Gor in exchange for those services, and in exchange for the Queen!"

Gon'ri's scar sank into the cleft of a frown on his forehead. His muscular spear arm began to rise, the heavy, bloodied point aimed directly at Zrand'ri's chest. But the latter began to laugh.

"Did you think you would find me unprepared against your treachery?" he asked. "You'll never take me, green man!"

And with this he broke the container loose from the chain on his chest, which action also pulled loose a large stopper. In a lightning-swift movement he flung the contents of it over Gon'ri, and the latter dropped his spear to clutch his face in a frenzied effort to claw off his skin. Zrand'ri's men had found one of Gurund Ritroon's storage batteries and had stolen some of the fluid from it. This he had thrown into Gon'ri's face.

In the resultant confusion, he escaped behind the altar through a subterranean passage. But one man, who was climbing into the temple through a back window, saw him and witnessed the trick of the secret exit. It was Djur Djinri. With bloodied spear and

battle-scarred shield, he followed Zrand'ri into the secret passage.

He found himself in ancient catacombs that led into a series of natural caverns. The recently ignited oil pots along the walls alerted him to the possibility that Zrand'ri had imprisoned Mnir'ra in this place.

Nor was he long in verifying this suspicion. He passed the open door of a dungeon, and around the next turn in the low-ceilinged passageway he came upon Zrand'ri, who was struggling with Mnir'ra, trying to force her to accompany him. Directly behind them were several openings, one of which appeared to open into the deeper darkness of another cavern.

At sight of him, Zrand'ri struck Mnir'ra, knocking her to the ground and momentarily stunning her before she could cry out. Then he turned with a snarl and dove under Djur Djinri's lunging spear. His wiry arms went around the other's legs and they both crashed to the ground.

In one instant, a foul blow crippled Djur Djinri momentarily, but in the same instant his powerful hands were around Zrand'ri's scrawny neck, and he squeezed to kill. Zrand'ri's clawing fingers tore at his mouth, his nose and his eyes. For a pain-blackened eternity it seemed to be a contest between them to see which could endure this torture the longest.

But Mnir'ra soon recovered sufficiently to pick up Djur Djinri's fallen spear, which she promptly drove into Zrand'ri's back. The High Priest arched backward, breaking the general's grip on his throat, and he screamed, then dropped to the ground.

BEHIND him, Djur Djinri heard the sound of running feet, and he heard shouts in the recognizable accent of the Bi'djar Ri. They had found the secret passage.

"Follow me!" he said to Mnir'ra, leading her into the dark passageway directly ahead of him. He had wrenched his spear out of Zrand'ri's back, but as Mnir'ra took one look behind her she saw the latter crawl painfully into the concealing shadows of a low niche in the corridor's wall.

Unluckily for Djur Djinri, he chose the wrong passage. He soon found himself in a *cul-de-sac*, a small, dark cavern without other opening than that through which they had come. And here the green men came upon him bearing torches and long spears.

Conversation was superfluous. Against absolutely hopeless odds, Djur Djinri fought his way valiantly into Gra'ghr's hall of eternal fame—and fell sobbing, not from the pain of his mortal wounds, but because of his helplessness to defend his queen....

After a while, he became aware of Zrand'ri standing over him. The High Priest was obviously on his last legs, but he held the business end of a broken spear in both his hands. The wavering light of a torch he had set in the ground accentuated the drawn lines of frustration and rage in his thin face.

"If you had not interfered today," he said, "I should have been ruler of Serin-Gor!"

He tried to raise the spear to drive it down into Djur Djinri's heart, but it required a terrific effort of his will even to stand up, and his movements were slow.

Behind him, Djur Djinri suddenly discerned something that for the first time filled his warrior's heart with dread. Out of a hole in the wall crept a threaded, deeper darkness, an oozing, amorphous thing that spread out across the wall with evil purpose. He knew very well what it was, though few had ever seen one and lived to tell about it. It was a living, almost

Indestructible web—a deadly Kran'jandoon.

In one supreme effort, Djur Djinri locked the toes of one foot behind Zrand'ri's left ankle, and with his other foot he shoved against the priest's left knee. This maneuver threw the other directly into the clutches of the monstrosity on the wall.

Instantly, Zrand'ri became tangled inextricably in the cloying, powerful web, and he screamed out in his terror, struggling futilely. And Djur Djinri laughed. He laughed because death was not so bitter to him now, because no one could have inflicted upon this traitor to Serin-Gor a more suitable punishment for his crime....

CHAPTER VIII

The Avenger

WHEN THE charge went off, the whole temple seemed to leap into the air, and Gurund Ritroon was flattened under a blast of splintered timbers and flying debris. When the smoke cleared, however, he shook his head and got up. There were several dark bruises on him where heavy objects had struck, but otherwise he was unhurt.

He immediately began to prepare himself for battle. Chest armor and a special helmet came first. Then there was a long, heavy, spiked bludgeon that no one else on Gra'ghr could have lifted. On his back was strapped a crossbow and full quiver of metal-tipped arrows, and at his left hip swung a cloth bag filled with crude but effective grenades. Instead of a shield, he carried the bazooka, with extra charges for it in the grenade bag. This weapon was slung over one shoulder, while in his two free hands he carried the mighty bludgeon.

As he stepped over the shattered barricade he was an apparition of terror to the hundreds of men who still waited for him outside. Dead men lay at his feet. Beyond, at a distance of about thirty yards, the rest stood looking at him in awe.

One of the red men, less awestruck than terrified, raised his crossbow in self-defense and fired it, aiming at Gurund Ritroon's neck. The metal-tipped arrow hit its mark, but to the amazement of all, it failed to penetrate the god-man!

The arrow stung painfully, but Gurund Ritroon knew he was fairly safe from all arrows. He reached for his grenade bag, then thought better of it.

"I am Gurund Ritroon!" he belatedly at them. "Zrand'ri is a false priest. Return to Rurz'tlid and defend your country against your true enemies—the Bi'djar Ril!"

Without waiting to see what the effect of his admonition would be, he turned to the bluff side of the temple to look for Djik'ri. He found the spot under the window where the other should have been, but he was not there. In the sand he saw the trail of a man who was bleeding and who had dragged himself painfully along the ground. Gurund Ritroon followed this trail, hopefully.

He did not have far to go before he found him. He lay between two large boulders, unable to crawl farther. Gravely wounded as he was, he looked up at Gurund Ritroon and smiled—then fainted.

Gurund Ritroon picked him up and carried him back to the temple. As he approached the blasted doorway he noticed that the beach had been cleared of Zrand'ri's men. Apparently they had either had a change of heart or decided on a strategic retreat.

In the temple, Gurund Ritroon doctored Djik'ri. He cut the arrow out of his back and cauterized the wound.

covering it with a mild poultice and a bandage. Then he strapped his bludgeon to his back and carried Djik'ri in his arms out of the temple and started walking down the beach....

"Where is Mnir'ra?" he asked.

WHEN HE arrived at Rurz'tlid, he marveled at the white beauty of the stone city, in spite of his anxiety concerning Mnir'ra. So preoccupied was he that he failed to notice at first that he met with no resistance. The people who had only heard of him, but never seen him before, hid in their houses and watched him from their secret points of vantage in amazement, and with newly awakening faith in the legend of the Lens. Spearmen who had formerly been under Zrand'ri now huddled on rooftops and watched him warily as he came walking down the middle of the street, carrying the limp form of Djik'ri in his arms. He was taller and stronger even than Gon'ri the Warrior, and he was white as marble. They knew, at last, that this was Gurund Ritroon.

Djur Djinri's guerrillas, under the white banner of the crossbow, gathered in his wake, cheering as they went, but not too exultantly. They seemed worried. In Rurz'tlid and on the beaches were many signs of the recent battle.

Gurund Ritroon knew, on first sight of the place, by the green and red bodies strewn about, that Gon'ri had attacked. And by the wrecked ships not far from shore he knew that the defenders had not done so badly.

But where was Mnir'ra?

Just then, Djik'ri stirred feebly in his arms. Gurund Ritroon saw him looking up at him with a feeble but grateful smile.

"We must find out what happened to Mnir'ra," Gurund Ritroon said to him.

Djik'ri's eyes widened with sudden

recollection and alarm. He looked at the spearmen on the rooftops and at Djur Djinri's guerrillas who crowded around him and Gurund Ritroon. He called to one officer nearby.

Gurund Ritroon saw the latter point seaward, and when he looked far out he saw for the first time the upper rigging of several sailing vessels just creeping beyond the horizon.

That was all he wanted to know. He had seen a certain ship in front of him near the shore which was almost intact. It was about twenty-five feet long, with two masts. Dead green men hung over its rails and lay on the deck.

He looked at the ocean waves to measure the wind and saw that it was favorable. So he suddenly laid Djik'ri down among his men and started for the ocean. Amidst cries of alarm and amazement, he waded hip deep into the water and came to the ship.

He placed his weapons and supplies on board and then got back into the water. He placed his hands under the ship's bow and pushed it off the sandy bottom into deep water—a feat which could not have been duplicated on Gra'ghr. Then, pulling himself up a hawser, he clambered on board again, turning his attention to the sails, which he unreefed and set in use. The fair wind filled them, and he began to tack away with the ebbing tide....

"Gurund Ritroon would attack the entire nation of Bi'djar-Tan single-handed," remarked one of Djik'ri's officers, as he watched the vessel move away. "They may overcome him by trickery or by force, in spite of his marvelous weapons and towering strength. We may never see him again."

Djik'ri had been carried to a rooftop and was being supported by the officer who has spoken. His greenish-blue hair waved about his shoulders as he watched his friend depart. "You

do not know him," he replied, "nor are you aware of the inner forces which drive him onward. I believe that his heart is with the Queen."

SEVERAL soldiers surrounding him looked at him with raised brows and opened mouths. "You mean, he is in love?" queried the officer who supported him.

"I am sure of it," said Djik'ri. "He loves Mnir'ra and she loves him. It is the same with them as it was with Gur and Altinra of old." Then he added, "Now tell me what information you have. Where is Zrand'ri?"

"He escaped, sire, through some secret exit in the temple, and Djur Djinri followed him. We know not where these two might be nor the fate of either."

"Good Djur'ri," said Djik'ri. "His name will not be forgotten by us. I have overheard some of you saying that it was he who led the chief resistance. You must send a detail at once to search the temple for the secret passage. He and Zrand'ri must be found."

"We are already searching, sire."

"Good. Then what of Gon'ri? Did he escape alive?"

"Yes, although we believe he may die. Zrand'ri, upon meeting with deception at his hands, threw over him some of the fiery liquid which Gurund Ritroon made for his boxes of invisible life that bites. Gon'ri's men led him away blind. But the Queen and many of our people went with the Bi'djar-Ri."

Djik'ri's face hardened. "If Gon'ri lives, he will organize another expedition, even in spite of Gurund Ritroon. Our god-friend is driven to vengeance by the emotion of his love, but Gon'ri will be moved to organize the total forces of his people against us, driven by a consuming hatred for us. And who can say which is stronger—love

or hate? A god-man or a nation of people? No, we must prepare ourselves quickly to meet an attack ten times the size of the one which you have just suffered. We must go to the temple and take out all of the new weapons and get them ready."

"But, sire, only Gurund Ritroon knows how to work them! Should we not concentrate on the crossbows and catapults alone?"

"You may concentrate on those, yes. Increase your weapons tenfold, twentyfold! Increase the army to its ultimate maximum! Everyone is going to have to fight for his salvation. But give me five hundred men. I remember much of what Gurund Ritroon taught me. Perhaps I could set up what he planned to do himself."

GURUND RITROON sailed all afternoon straight out to sea. He tried to keep his upper rigging just out of sight of the green-man fleet, but he stayed close enough to keep their mast tops visible. Visibility was remarkable due to a crystal clearness of the air not known to Earth except in high altitudes.

As the four suns of Gra'ghr sank below Ces'son Nar and Lan Ba'na appeared, he quickly plotted his course before losing sight of the other ships in the starless darkness, which was relieved only by the lonely, golden moonpath on the alien waters. Once he was sure of his direction, he lay down on the deck and watched for the purple moon, Ral, to rise over his starboard bow.

He was thirsty, but he could not find any water on board, although he did find a meager supply of food. On a sudden hunch, he sampled some seawater and found to his surprise that he was sailing on fresh water. Its taste was vaguely bitter, but it was very satisfying to the thirst.

Somewhat relieved by this discovery, he drank freely of the water of Ces'son Nar. It is often upon the ill-advised action of an unguarded moment that unhappy destinies are founded. No one had told him that the waters of the Barrier Sea were dangerous to drink. They were not harmful to sea life, but if taken internally—deadly poison.

Sometime past midnight, he was in convulsions. After a weakening attack of nausea, he began to have gripping pains, accompanied by dizziness. He knew it was due to the seawater; but it was too late to do anything about it. Just as the pain became insupportable he lost consciousness, and the lonely vessel sailed uncertainly toward a distant coastline that was just appearing on the horizon....

CHAPTER IX

In the Enemy's Camp

WHEN HE regained consciousness, somewhat to his surprise, it was with an awareness of having been out for some considerable period of time. Even before he opened his eyes, he knew that he was unarmed and a prisoner. For he felt many ropes pressing against his bared chest, binding him firmly to the ground.

When he opened his eyes he found that he lay in a great square in the center of a somber-looking city of gray stone buildings. Green men walked along the streets or rode through the crowds mounted on Ban'thorns, and a number of armed guards stood all around the square, prohibiting the curious from approaching him. There were about fifty guards—enough to cause him trouble even if he were well and free to move.

His weapons, armor, grenades and pouch were all gone. He felt sick and

almost hopeless. But deep within him still smouldered the power of the Lens, blended together with an Irish temper that was still fired by thoughts of what the Bi'djar Ri might have done with Mnir'ra. These alone sustained him.

He lay there and thought. First, he had evidently survived what might normally have been a lethal dose of sea water. But what now? Where would he end up? And where would the Serin Ni end up? Were these green men powerful enough in their numbers to recognize a much larger invasion force? Would Djik'ri be able to prepare an adequate resistance? And what about Mnir'ra? Would Gon'ri keep her, or would he try to sacrifice her?

When he turned his head to look at his guards again, he saw a surprising number of spearmen gathering together. They had seen him wake up and were summoning reinforcements. Silently, a whole battalion of them was falling in. And he did not like their looks. But he could only lie there in the best Gulliver tradition and wait for he knew not what to happen.

After a while, a frail green man who wore a dazzling emerald on his forehead came riding into view on a nervous-looking Ban'thorn, and the guards stepped deferentially aside to let him pass. But what startled Gurund Ritroon was the person who rode beside him on a second Ban'thorn. For it was none other than Mnir'ra.

He raised his head and strained at his ropes, but for his pains he received about a dozen spear jabs. None of them penetrated his skin, but he felt that they could have if hard-driven. Mnir'ra tried to spur her mount in his direction, but the guards blocked her path.

"Gurund Ritroon!" she cried out to him. "You should have remained with

my people to help them resist the great invasion which is being organized! Gon'ri is gathering all the forces of Bi'djar-Tan against us! And you they intend to sacrifice as a supreme appeal to their gods for vengeance! Oh, Gurund," she cried bitterly, "why did you come!"

The green men were laughing derisively, and the bejeweled one on the Ban'thorn beside Mnir'ra addressed his people, saying, "What delusion is this, calling our prisoner Gurund Ritroon? He is no god, nor could he avenge the death of a *lur'lur*. You see him, do you not?—tied and bound, weakened near to death by the poison of Ces'son Nar. It is upon such an imposter as this that the redskins have pinned their hopes for victory over us!"

The green men laughed in huge delight, although Gurund Ritroon heard someone remark, aside, to a companion that he was the *only* one who had ever survived the illness that was induced by drinking sea water.

"Mnir'ra," he called to the little queen, "my mission among your people is completed. I have left in Serin-Gor the instruments of vengeance, and Djikn Kinri shall wield them against your enemies. What I have come here for is personal. I have come to take you home!"

While the green men laughed again, Mnir'ra became engaged in conversation with the bejeweled official who had accompanied her. After a moment, she turned hesitantly to Gurund Ritroon and spoke to him.

"This man," she said, "is Kritu Kinri, High Priest of Zich'yeh, the green men's God of Destiny. He is handling most of the government here while Gond'ri's doctors attend his wounds. He says..." She paused, as though she found it difficult to go on.

"Don't be afraid," said Gurund Rit-

roon. "Let me know the truth. What does this son of a Zat have to say?"

"He says his government will release me if you will demonstrate the use of the weapons you brought with you."

"Where will they release you to, and what are the guarantees?"

THE LITTLE priest quickly conveyed the answer to Mnir'ra, in a low tone of voice, while his beady little eyes never left Gurund Ritroon's face.

"He says," answered Mnir'ra, "that there are enough captured Serin Ni here to man one of their ships and sail it back to Serin-Gor. He says he'll place a ship at their disposal and put me on board, and that you will be allowed to witness our departure."

Gurund Ritroon chose to address Kritu Kinri directly. "My weapons would not do you any good," he said, "because I have left greater ones behind me for the Serin Ni to use against you." He was thinking fast. His statement, which puzzled Mnir'ra inasmuch as it appeared to invalidate his one opportunity for bartering, was carefully calculated to mislead the priest, whom he recognized as a cagey character. If he had immediately agreed, the priest would have suspected a subterfuge, and he would be afforded little opportunity to escape as he would be doubly watched at every turn. Yet, at the same time, by impressing the other of the danger facing their hordes in view of possible new weapons in the hands of the red men, he knew that his own weapons would acquire an even greater value in the eyes of the Bi'djar Ri than before.

Kritu Kinri answered him sharply. "You will leave that matter to us to evaluate. If you refuse to demonstrate your weapons, we will be pleased to sacrifice not only yourself, but Queen

Mnir'ra Nikin'ra and all other Serin Ni prisoners simultaneously!"

"One question," said Gurund Ritroon. "When will the second invasion begin?"

Kritu Kinri drew himself up as tall as possible in his saddle. "I am not the one under questioning here!" he retorted.

"All right, all right! I accept the terms! But there is one condition: I cannot effectively demonstrate my weapons in my present weakened condition. I need rest and food. As you can see, I am helplessly weak." Actually, he could have burst his bonds, but his full strength was needed, plus his armament and weapons, before it would be worth while risking a break for freedom. Moreover, he was fighting for time—time for Djik'ri, across the Barrier Sea.

Mnir'ra's eyes glistened. "Gurund!" she cried. "I won't leave you here! Let them send the others home, but I will stay!"

She turned to the priest to argue this point, while Gurund Ritroon shouted at her in protest. Suddenly appreciating the true significance of the situation, Kritu Kinri opened his eyes with a new awareness of the possibilities. He nodded to Mnir'ra in silent assent, and then led her away in the direction of the palace....

SO THEY released Gurund Ritroon from his bonds, but they kept him in the great plaza surrounded by a thousand armed guards. He presumed that their respect for him was due largely to a certain amount of superstitious fear that he might be the true Avenger after all. Yet the guards tried to bolster civilian morale by openly defying him and laughing at him. Some even spat at his feet and said he was not fit for sacrifice.

But they gave him food, drink and

rest. They thought he might need a week to recover fully, so they gave him three days, and he played the part. Actually, his wonderful resilience restored him within two days.

During this reprieve, he studied his surroundings as unobtrusively as possible. Most outstanding was the fact that the town was built along the base of a great, granite cliff. At one place, above the center of the city, a slender cascade of water descended coldly into a basin below, and Gurund Ritroon wondered if there were some natural reservoir above. He had some ideas if there were, and if he could find out where his weapons were hidden.

He also became familiar with major edifices within the city. One was the palace where Gon'ri the Warrior and Mnir'ra and Kritu Kinri were. It was the stateliest building in sight, with great inlaid domes and decorative towers and pillared facade. But it was not the largest. The temple of Zich'yeh was a spectacular work of stone built to fill worshippers with awe and superstitious fear. Pyramidal steps led up to Grecian-type columns, above which was a colossal carved likeness of the God of Destiny, himself surrounded by gargoyle-like figures representing lesser deities ruled by Zich'yeh. Beyond the columns was an open amphitheater in which were the blood-stained altars, mounted on pyramidal prosceniums and surrounded by burning oil pots which represented eternal fires of faith and devotion.

By the time the third day arrived, Gurund Ritroon was fully his old self, but to safeguard his advantage he acted weak and helpless. He could see preparations getting under way in the harbor for the departure of the shipload of red men. He was determined that Mnir'ra should return to Serin-Gor regardless of her desire to stay, and he sent a message to Kritu Kinri

to this effect.

The guards were subsequently ordered to bring him to the palace, and he found that the route lay partially along the water front. In fact, he passed within earshot of the ship carrying the red men and they cheered him.

"Hail, Son of Gur, the Avenger!" they shouted. Gurund Ritroon felt that this was premeditated propaganda intended to confuse and demoralize the green men.

The Bi'djar Ri citizenry were permitted, on the other hand, to belittle him as a means of counter-propaganda. They jeered and spat and threw stones. And one small group derisively planted a crown of thorns on his head.

THIS MADE him think hard. And it made him humble—humble before the magnitude of his responsibility. He had told Mnir'ra his mission here was a personal one—that he had done what he could for the Serin Ni. But now he was ashamed. His duties here had only just begun.

Earth belonged to the universe he had left, but the Land of the Lens was a cosmic appendix, an orphan in the scheme of Creation, for which *he*, by predestination, was responsible. He was forced, once again, to face the inescapable reality that he *was* Gurund Ritroon. And as he did so, he felt the power of the Lens throbbing in him as never before.

"Do not leave without your queen!" he called out to the Serin Ni. "She will leave with you!"

Many of the red men received the message enthusiastically. They raised their fists and shouted approvingly. But there were some who dissented. One of these latter sprang into the rigging of the ship and called to Gurund Ritroon.

"The Queen cannot come with us,"

he shouted. "Gon'ri has claimed her in compensation for our resistance to his forces of invasion. If you don't uphold your side of the agreement, he'll have us burned alive on board this ship!" The spokesman was pale with apprehension. There was much grumbling on board, and many an anxious face was turned expectantly upward to Gurund Ritroon's bearded countenance.

"Then go," he answered. "And tell Djikri to try to use everything I taught him!" He could not hope, however, that the greatest weapons, Vee-Nine and Vee-Ten, could be set up by Djik'ri. "Good luck, soldiers! Long live Serin-Gor—and the King!"

As he moved on, under the vicious proddings of the green men, some of the red men cheered him, while others chanted, "Save us, Mnir'ra, Son of Gur! Hail Gurund Ritroon!"

Then Gurund Ritroon paused to look at something in amazement. Rounding a shoulder of the coastline, there came a great fleet of warships of the green men, which was strange because there was already a considerable fleet in the harbor. Some one hundred and twenty, to be exact. But here came at least a hundred and fifty more, evidently from some other port or ports of Bi'djar-Tan, and they were filled to the gunwhales with powerful painted warriors who carried gigantic bows and arrows longer than themselves. They were green men, but apparently imported from a savage region of the country, for they were a different type. Among them moved excited and vicious-looking Ban'thorns.

"*The Djar Li!*" shouted guards all around him, as well as the citizenry. He gathered from excited comments he overheard that the prospect of joining the Second Invasion had made it possible for Gon'ri the Warrior to enlist this fierce, renegade offshoot of the green tribes, and that they were

Gra'ghr's most powerful and ferocious fighters.

"Saints preserve us!" Gurund Ritroon muttered, in English. "A fleet of nearly three hundred ships and a floating army of close to thirty thousand—the worst of them being mounted savages!"

He knew that with the right tactics Gon'ri's forces could now penetrate Serin-Gor's improved beach defenses, no matter how well reinforced. Unless Vee-Nine and Vee-Ten were set up, Serin-Gor was going to be wiped out!

CHAPTER X

Tyrant versus Titan

WITH PREMEDITATED disrespect, the guards prodded Gurund Ritroon into the palace. They led him down a spectacular stone hallway lined with the carved images of leering gods. Then two ornately carved gates swung back, admitting him to the throneroom.

A domed ceiling arched above his head. The large room was illuminated by daylight that penetrated cathedral-like niches in the walls. And Gurund Ritroon's heart leaped with exultation when he saw all of his weapons and supplies piled up against the wall to his right. Guarded as they were by the Bi'djar Ri, he felt he could take possession of them when he chose to do so. Then this contempt of the green men was genuine, he thought. They actually did not believe he was Gurund Ritroon. Fools! With the bludgeon alone he could clear out the palace!

On a great stone dais was a granite throne, and on this sat Gon'ri the Warrior—but a greatly altered Gon'ri. His smooth green face of pre-invasion days was now horribly mutilated by

burns and white, leprous spots. One eye was completely gone, removed by surgeons. The other stared glassily at him, entirely lidless. His once impressive countenance had been transformed and twisted into a hideous nightmare, and it did more than hurt his monumental pride. It wounded him mortally, giving him a touch of insanity which was concentrated in a maniacal hatred of the red men.

On Gon'ri's right sat Wur'lun, the *karn-ger* cat, the like of which Gurund Ritroon had never seen. But he stared into its three, menacing eyes for only a brief moment, nor was he cognizant of its rumbling growls as it watched him. For on Gon'ri's left sat Mnir'ra.

She was not on a throne. She sat on the floor beside Gon'ri like a slave girl, publicly humiliated. Since Gurund Ritroon had last seen her, she had evidently been subjected to such treatment that her pride had been partially supplanted by fear. There was fear in her eyes as she looked at Gurund Ritroon, and a look of supplication. All of which served to augment his rage, and he had to struggle mightily to control himself.

Gon'ri looked at him in some wonderment for a long moment. Then he addressed him peremptorily. "Whence come you?" he asked.

His attitude suddenly unleashed a reckless defiance in his supposed prisoner. The latter, for the first time since his capture, drew himself to his full height.

"You know as well as I," he replied, in a voice that reverberated in the throneroom and made Wur'lun rise to his feet, growling. "I am Son of Gur, the Avenger! I come from the Outer Emptiness, from beyond the Lens, in fulfillment of Gur's ancient promise—that if you disturbed the peace or threatened freedom in this world, I would come, and I would avenge such a violation of the fundamental com-

mandment!"

All other green men in the throne-room, even including Kritu Kinri, now looked at Gurund Ritroon in amazement. And Mnir'ra suddenly straightened up with renewed pride. She looked at him, no longer afraid. But Gon'ri sprang defiantly to his feet.

"You lie!" he shouted. "No god would have been poisoned by the waters of Ces'son Nar, nor would he have permitted himself to be captured! You are an imposter whom I have permitted to live only because I want you to demonstrate the use of your weapons. That demonstration will buy the lives of the Serin Ni whom we hold captive in the harbor, but not your own life. It shall be offered up, with apologies, to Zich'yeh, God of Destiny!"

"And what of Queen Mnir'sr Nikin'ra?" queried Gurund Ritroon serenely.

"That is none of your business!"

GURUND RITROON took several steps toward the throne, while a hundred green bowmen threatened him. "Hear me, Gon'ri," he said in a thunderous voice. "A god may do as he pleases, because his power is superior to that of men. I was not poisoned by Ces'son Nar, nor could your men have tied me down with ropes had I not willed it. I merely chose to come to you in this manner to test you, to learn if you really contemplated total violation of the ancient commandment. Now I am convinced that you are guilty, and I stand ready to avenge!"

"I shall depose here!" shrieked Gon'ri, his single, lidless eye glistening with maniacal rage. "You will do as you are told! I command you to demonstrate the use of your weapons—now!"

"My weapons?" Gurund Ritroon smiled.

"Don't think we are naive," retort-

ed Gon'ri. "Look!" He pointed to the wall of the throne room where the weapons had been.

Now Gurund Ritroon saw that the grenades, the armor, the bludgeon and the crossbow had been moved to one side under a strong guard. The bazooka, however, was mounted in one of the narrow window niches, its muzzle pointing outside. It was bound in this position with rope.

"Outside you will see an ancient stone building," explained Gon'ri. "I am told that the weapon we have mounted in the window has great power. Load it and fire it! Try to destroy that building!"

Gurund Ritroon complied, in part. He walked over to the bazooka and checked it. It was loaded, just as he had left it. Then he looked out the window.

About fifty yards dead ahead a deserted building of stone. But beyond it, at about five hundred yards, towered the pillars of the proud temple of Zich'yeh. And Gurund Ritroon smiled a grim smile.

Deliberately, he elevated the bazooka and fired. There followed a very brief moment of expectant silence. Then, from afar came the roar of an explosion, and observers both inside and outside the palace raised a shout of alarm and dismay as they saw the pillars of the great temple tumble into ruin.

"There is my answer to your threat of sacrifice!" shouted Gurund Ritroon, turning to Gon'ri.

"And here is mine!" cried the latter furiously. Whereupon he released Wur'lun, and the green guards scattered in terror as the tremendous cat darted toward the doomed stranger. Even Mnir'ra rose to her feet and screamed aloud in her fright.

But Gurund Ritroon felt in him the power of the Lens, and he knew that this was the day of the Avenger.

The time had come at last to fulfill his ancient destiny.

As the giant animal hurled itself upon him, he felt sudden pain, but he did not yield. He merely concentrated on maneuvering the tremendously powerful creature into a position where he could break its back, which he did. And though it was five or six times as heavy as any green man, he tossed it to the foot of the throne. There were gashes on his arms, legs and abdomen, but his blood coagulated quickly, and he was not seriously harmed. Many bowmen shot arrows at him at point blank range, but the missiles bounced futilely off his skin.

Kritu Kinri leapt to Gon'ri's side and raised his hand. "We are doomed!" he cried. "This is in truth Gurund Ritroon! Lay down your arms!"

But Gon'ri drew his long dagger and plunged it to its hilt into Kritu Kinri. "I am still in command here!" he shouted. "Surround him, spearmen and bowmen! Get in close range! Kill him!"

Gurund Ritroon rushed a wall of spears and a hail of arrows, some of which did penetrate him far enough to be painful. The spears he found he could sweep aside like so many twigs. And many who leapt upon him died.

He wanted his weapons and he got them. The first thing he did was to throw a grenade into the middle of the room. When it went off, it killed a score of Gon'ri's first line infantry who were just entering the throne room to assist the guards. In the resultant confusion he made for the throne and got hold of Mnir'ra. Gon'ri had suddenly disappeared.

"Keep behind me!" he told her. He gave her the grenades to carry.

He had torn the bazooka from its fastenings and now it lay across his back, while in his hands he wielded the bludgeon. The armor he had aban-

doned, for there was no time to put it on.

HE KNEW that even he could not keep on his feet before the concerted rush of hundreds of armed green men, so he backed toward an exit behind the throne, through which Gon'ri had escaped. With every step he swung the bludgeon, destroying everything that came within its range.

Several guards made the mistake of trying to get behind the pair to capture Mnir'ra. When she cried out in alarm, Gurund Ritroon whirled upon them, decapitating one of them with his club and crushing the chest of another with a blow of his fist. A third guard retreated in terror. Mnir'ra smiled at him proudly. She alone was not awestruck by his terrifying aspect. Death incarnate though he was, she came back to him confidently, and he swept her into his arms and ran through the exit.

Outside, it looked as though the entire nation of the B'djar Ri was massed against him. The green men were pouring off the great fleets in the harbor and joining the regular troops, jam-packing the whole city. This was all-out war, and he was alone before them.

They were squared off on rooftops behind walls made up of metal shields, their spears and bows poised for action. The spearmen and the bowmen waited, in Bunker Hill fashion, to see the whites of his eyes. But he had no intention of trying to face such overwhelming odds.

He set Mnir'ra down, quickly reloaded his bazooka, and fired into the midst of the heaviest troop concentration he could find. He saw Mnir'ra hide her face to escape the sight of a score of green bodies literally tearing apart and flying through the air in a rain of blood, of metal shields twisted and blasted away like so many leaves blown into dust by the

autumn wind, of whole companies of men falling on their faces in terror.

He followed this blast with two grenades, producing equal havoc, and the offensive line became defensive, temporarily retreating. Some warriors were of a tougher strain, however. They deployed themselves in such a way as to corral him against the cliff behind the palace. Beyond these men, Gurund Ritroon saw the more savage Djar Li tribesmen, mounted on shrieking Ban'thorns, coming into the fight with their giant bows and murderous-looking spears. They were yelling a blood-curdling war chant as they drew near, raising the morale of the regulars in the foreground.

Swiftly, Gurund Ritroon led Mnir'ra to the cliff and along its base, until he found a place where he could scale it. He put Mnir'ra on his back and climbed, while arrows pinged against the rocks—the long, swifter arrows of Djar Li, for ordinary arrows could not reach him. Though their power was largely spent when they struck, they struck hard, and he knew that to receive one of these at close range might be very damaging. A close-range volley could perhaps even be fatal.

He climbed faster, getting temporarily out of range. As he withdrew upward, the army closed in below, as much under cover as possible.

When he topped the cliff, he saw what he had hoped to find—a huge natural water reservoir which stretched placidly back among the hills for a quarter of a mile.

"This is going to be good," he said to Mnir'ra, helping her off his back.

"What are you going to do?" she asked excitedly.

"Watch, my love! Just watch!"

He quickly removed all remaining grenades from his knapsack and placed them in a strategic spot at the neck of the waterfall. Then he pulled one of the pins. It was a special gre-

nade he had prepared with a delayed reaction chemical cap. Picking up Mnir'ra, he ran to a granite ledge high above the city of the green men.

"Watch!" he told her. In spite of his excitement, he felt a shiver of delight as he looked down at her lying in his arms. And he wondered if fate would enable him to have her always, or if his strange god-destiny would deprive them both of that happiness.

Mnir'ra sensed something of what he was thinking as he looked down at her. She patted his chest and smiled exactly as every female in the universe has smiled throughout eternity, when she has found her man.

"We may not get back home again," she said, "but to be with you for only a short while is worth death at their hands."

"We'll get back to Serin-Gor, sweetheart," he told her. "Watch the waterfall!"

B-R-R-AM!!!

He felt Mnir'ra stiffen with fright as he watched great segments of the cliff belly out into space, followed by a screen of water. The young avalanche hardly got under way before it was drowned in a flood. A quarter-mile lake began to roar out of a great gap in the wall.

The green men below set up a great cry and began to run in every direction in order to get to the highest available points. But the flood caught many and bounced them off their feet onto its crest and then under. It roared and soared between and over the smaller houses, racing in rising tributaries through the streets, overcoming companies and battallions of soldiers and thousands of citizens.

Mnir'ra did not want to see any more. She hid her face against Gurund Ritroon's chest.

Well, he told himself, it was war, wasn't it? The whole planet was at stake. And besides, all was not duck

soup yet. These green devils were tough, and the savage Djar Li tribesmen were like the fiends of Pandemonium.

CHAPTER XI

The Last Invasion

NOW WAS the time to take advantage of the confusion. With Mnir'ra on his back, he descended the cliff swiftly, calculating that the flood was sufficiently spent to wade in, considering his unusual density. With water swirling around his waist, he worked his way through the city, aided by the seaward current, toward the ships that were tugging at their anchors or capsizing in the flood that had obliterated the waterfront.

All he wanted was one ship. As he neared his goal, an arrow or two sang past his ears, and one finally struck him painfully in the shoulder, almost striking Mnir'ra. It was a Djar Li arrow, and this time it stuck, but he continued on.

He quickly reached the beach and waded out to a nearby ship. It was a two-masted vessel. Some frantic green men were trying to climb on board, but he knocked them off. One already on board viciously shot a metal-tipped arrow from a captured Serin Ni crossbow, and it grooved his right cheek, drawing blood. The arrow in his shoulder hampered him. He threw his weapons on the ship's deck and climbed aboard, killing the bowman, who dared to grapple with him.

He lay his knapsack and other accoutrements on the deck and also let Mnir'ra down, whereupon he immediately busied himself with the anchor and the sails. Mnir'ra picked up a dead green man's bow and quiver and took up a battle station at the gunwale. Some nearby ships were now swarming with green men, and they too were making ready to sail in pursuit.

"Mnir'ra!" he exclaimed, shoving a black mop of hair off his forehead and wiping his bloody cheek with a forearm. "Get under cover! I'll take care of them!"

He made her take cover in a nearby companionway. When he got up sail on the out-surging flood-tide, he reloaded his bazooka. But he found that he should have looked ahead more frequently than astern after his pursuers. One lone ship came around the promontory. It was a late comer, but it was packed with a hundred painted Djar Li bowmen. Much was their astonishment when they saw the devastation wrought in the capital city and when they saw also the spectacular cause of it all sailing out to sea with his back toward them.

The pursuing crews saw the new-comer and at once realized the magnitude of their advantage. As though by mutual consent, no signal of recognition was given to the other ship. The commander of the new ship cautioned his men to absolute silence.

Gurund Ritroon sensed that something was wrong, but he turned too late. It was lucky, in fact, that he did not turn fully around before they fired at such close range, for he might have been blinded by the hail of long, hard-flung arrows. He got them in his back and right side. About eight arrows twanged into his hide to a depth of from a quarter inch to three inches, filling him with insupportable agony. His mind blacked out momentarily, and he sagged to his knees while the green men cheered.

The triumphant bowmen reached for more arrows while scores of other ships near shore filled their sails and began to move toward him.

"Gurund!" cried Mnir'ra from the companionway. "They're going to shoot again!"

GRITTING his teeth, he raised his bazooka horizontal with the wa-

ter and fired. The resultant explosion put the aggressor ship out of commission, with one mast down and a hole in its side, listing to port. To show he meant business, he loaded and fired again, and the blast threw many of the crew into the sky.

This was a lesson for the following ships, although they did not know that the Avenger was out of ammunition. They kept their distance. They only followed now because they were hopeful that the blast of arrows he had received would prove fatal.

As Gurund Ritroon sank lower on the deck in a bloody sweat, he saw that about a hundred and seventy of Gon'ri's ships had formed into a formidable vengeance fleet and had gotten under way. That was still an ample force to take Serin-Gor, even against fire brands and catapults and crossbows.

Mnir'ra came to him where he lay panting on the deck. She bent over his face with a pale, frightened look.

"Don't be afraid, honey," he spoke unconvincingly. "We'll make it yet."

"Gurund!" she answered. "The Bi'djar Ri mean nothing to me! It is you! Only you. You are losing blood! I must do something for you. Have you some medicine in your things? May I pull out the arrows?"

"First," he panted weakly, "you'd better learn something about navigation and how to steer home in case I'm unable to help."

The yellow suns of Gra'ghr were sinking, and he pointed out the rising purple moon that would be the road marker on the way back to Serin-Gor. The wind, he knew, was constant, almost unvarying, out here on the poisonous Barrier Sea. He told her to concentrate on the helm.

"Now you can try pulling out some of the arrows, while she's sailing easy," he said. "It'll hurt least if you'll use both hands on the arows and pull them out quickly."

To Mnir'ra it was equally as painful. But she went to her task, while Gurund Ritroon bit his lip and tried to think hard of something else, of Djik'ri and his preparations against this new invasion.

On the third arrow he could not resist crying out, but Mnir'ra knew it was then or never and she continued swiftly, while his head swam. When she finished, he said feebly, "How far back is the fleet?"

"They stay always at the same distance," she answered.

He drifted into an exhausted stupor. Too much blood, he thought disconnectedly. Weakening...

HE AWOKE to find Mnir'ra's face and hair pressed against his cheek. She was crying.

"Beloved," he whispered.

"Oh, dearest! You're dying!" she cried helplessly. "What can I do? I love you so, and I am so helpless! And I need you—oh my darling, I need you. This whole world needs you! You can't die!"

"I'm still ticking," he said, forcing a grin. He was aware of a feverish glow in his face. He was not very hopeful. "If something happens to me," he said, "tell Djik'ri to make use of everything I taught him."

But he thought that all he had taught Djik'ri would come to nothing if the green men took over, or it would be used wrongly. It was more than a Promethean knowledge of fire. He thought in desperation that he would have to survive long enough to set up Vee Ten and Vee Eleven. Without these the red men were lost.

With only the purple moon to light the sky, the Barrier Sea presented a weird, unreal aspect. The numerous sails of Gon'ri's super invasion fleet filled the horizon like motionless ghosts frozen in eternity. And some-

how Gurund Ritroon felt that this was his last night on Gra'ghr.

But Mni'ra's soft cheek against his was real. She kissed him lingeringly and told him many womanly things that he could not consciously grasp but which he felt instinctively were everything he wanted to hear.

"You must live," she whispered, caressing his ear with her lips. "If you die, I will walk in Zi'lgar-Lon alone, I will follow Altinra into the sleep of forever, for I cannot live with only the memory of you!"

He carressed her, in spite of his pain, and he kissed her mouth, her throat, and her breast.

"I've looked for you for a million years," he gasped, "but now I may lose you, I may be taken back through the Lens. If the Lens takes me—" Pain stopped his voice.

"If the Lens takes you, you will try to return," she said.

"I—I don't know," he answered. "Maybe—"

"You must promise!" she exclaimed.

"But maybe I can't!" he protested. "The Lens—"

"I shall wait," she said. "A hundred purple moons I shall wait—if you go. After that—I shall walk where Altinra walked, in Zi'lgar-Lon...."

"Mni'ra."

"Yes, beloved?"

He clenched his teeth against pain and took her tightly into his arms....

DAWN FOUND him half delirious, within sight of Serin-Gor, and with Gon'ri's great fleet almost within bow range. They were gaining confidence, because their lookouts had not seen him get to his feet once during the trip.

Mni'ra climbed to the crow's nest and reported to him what she saw. The catapults on shore were three times as numerous as before, all set and ready. Crude forts made out of sand bags and

logs had been set up all along the beach, and she could see what seemed to be as many as ten thousand men with shields waiting for the great invasion.

The fact that nobody was cheering the approach of their own ship led her to believe that her countrymen considered theirs as the flagship of the enemy.

"Gon'ri is within bow range," she said, "but we are not yet in range of our own archers."

He feebly lifted his head and he thought it would split with the effort. "Unless they get Vee Ten set up in time, they're still lost! I've got to hold out! We've got to get there, Mni'ra—
ahead of Bi'djar Ri!"

But Gon'ri's hard driving fleet drew ever closer on their heels and Mni'ra saw with dread the endless number of Djar Li bowmen pressed against the gunwales, all their cruel little eyes turned upon Gurund Ritroon.

"Done for! Done for!" he panted, under his breath, in English, trying to keep his head up so that he could see the shore.

Suddenly, a vast shower of arrows came at him, and he cried out to Mni'ra to duck down in the crow's nest. But when she saw more arrows dart into his body, she merely stood where she was, eyes wide and dry. The feeling that he would be killed a certainty in her heart.

"Mni'ra!" he shouted. "Protect yourself! You'll be killed!"

Just then they both saw it. They looked and were silent with astonishment. Out from shore sped Vee Ten, sure and terrible, a streak of guaranteed death.

But Gurund Ritroon had no time to be elated over the apparent fact that Djik'ri had actually set up Vee Ten himself. Because Vee Ten happened to be aimed straight at his own ship!

The rocket bomb soared in an arc and headed on a chute of flame directly for the deck. In a fit of desperation, he found one last hidden store of energy, enough to help him stagger to his feet.

FROM THE shore, Djik'ri and his men looked aghast at the sight of their own Avenger rising up off the deck and taking the full blast of the bomb. His chest and face were hidden in a roaring blast that caused the ship to rock violently. Then he was seen to fall to the deck, while the figure of Serin-Gor's lost queen, Mnr'sr Nikinra, was seen to climb frantically down from the crow's nest.

Djik'ri, from his vantage point behind the rocket bomb batteries, choked on a cry of anguish.

"It's Gurund Ritroon and the Queen!" cried a lieutenant at his side. "Great Gur! We've destroyed the Avenger!"

"Sink the fleet!" shouted Djik'ri bitterly. "Sink them all! Give them everything we've got! Vee Ten! The catapults! The fire brands! Pray Gur that Mnr'sr's ship doesn't strike a Vee Eleven!"

Little did Mnr'sr know that her ship was wallowing crazily along between dark blobs of death hidden in the water—mines fashioned by Gurund Ritroon's own hands.

She was only vaguely aware of a sky filled with flaming death, of ships blasting into pieces of wood and men, sails rising in flames from the fire brands. For Gurund Ritroon, her great, benevolent avenger god, was dying. She stood straight and motionlessly for a moment beside him and looked with almost unseeing eyes out at the battle. She felt the imminence of death upon her own head as the hard driving enemy ships closed in around her. But death seemed not unwelcome. She kneeled suddenly and lay her small

head on her lover's brow. For a moment, she thought he stirred. A smile formed faintly on his bloodied lips.

Then she straightened up again, vividly aware of a ship next to hers and a green man with horrible scars marking his one-eyed face. He stood on the bridge with a Serin Ni crossbow in his powerful hands. And its metal-barbed arrow was aimed at her heart.

She could sense the wave of triumphant hate that Gon'ri the Warrior's single, staring eye sent out. She stood unyielding where she was, a perfect target.

At that moment, however, Vee Eleven abruptly entered the picture. Both ships struck the mine simultaneously. Blast knocked them ponderously apart, tearing up planking and rigging and dumping green men into the sea. And it knocked Gurund Ritroon into fitful consciousness.

He was in the water. He saw Mnr'sr swimming like a mermaid, and he remembered with a great sense of relief that she was one of Gra'ghr's greatest swimmers. But his bodily density was carrying him swiftly downward.

His perspective became confused. Was he hurtling through water—or endless space?

LOUISE HAD long since ceased to cry. She sat motionlessly beside the hospital bed and just listened to Flannigan as he droned onward, trying to finish his insane story. His eyes stared beyond her, as though looking again into his imagined Land of the Lens.

"You know most of the rest," he said. "When I came back out of Rheingold crater, Deegan and your father were still there. Gilbert had been struck down by a meteor. Although I had lived many moons in the Land of the Lens, in our own time only seventy hours had passed.

"And so we started back. I went

along merely because I felt I owed it to them, to get them back to Earth if I could. But you know about that—our struggle against the meteors, and the radioactive infections picked up on the moon. Deegan died only one day from home, and now your father—”

“And you, Michael!” she cried out, her eyes flooding again with tears.

“No,” he said, “I may live.”

Her face brightened, hopefully. “What do you mean? How, Michael?”

“If I can get back through the Lens,” he said. “The Lens won’t let me die if I am within its range of direct influence. It will take me through! I’ve figured that out. I’m sure of it!”

She shook her head, shuddering, and turned away to hide her face.

“You think I’m insane,” he said swiftly. “You think the Land of the Lens is the product of delirium, induced by my experiences and my illness. But I was there, and I’m going back! I’ve got to!”

Louise turned to him and threw her arms about his neck, sobbing. “Oh, darling, I dreamed of our love and our life together—here! If you are to live, why can’t you stay—”

“You forget. Here I’m dying of radioactive poisoning, and I’m sterile, in case you don’t remember. But if I could get back through the Lens—”

“Oh Michael! Michael!” she sobbed.

“Louise, you’re young, healthy and beautiful. Your life is before you. Would you want me to stay on here and die? What good would that do either of us?”

“But Michael! This mad dream of going back to the Moon—how could you? The expedition you made cost millions. It’s all over. Nobody is going to refinance—”

“Wrong again, sweet. You forget that they want the rest of those readings from outer space. The ship still exists. Nobody would volunteer to pi-

lot it, because it means practical suicide. But to me, an otherwise doomed man, it means a slim chance for life—endless life. Science may be willing to finance repairs to that ship, and a load of fuel—enough fuel for a one-way trip, anyway. I’ll pay them for it. I’ll radio back the readings they want....”

TWO MONTHS later, Louise was driving home from Mount Palomar. They had permitted her to see the rocket herself, a tiny pinpoint of light, far out in the depths of space.

True to his word, Flannigan had sent back more readings from the new instruments, until meteors had struck, destroying his transmitter. After that, she could only guess at his fate.

But she could not help wondering, as she drove along over the highway, if there were actually a Land of the Lens, and if he would make it after all. And if he returned there, would it be as god or man? If he were too late and Mnir’sr Nikinra had already gone to Zi’lgar-Lon, would he follow her?

She shook her head, trying to regain a foothold in the rational world of her own terra firma. It was all so insane. There was no Lens, she told herself, no Gra’ghr, no Serin-Gor.

But into her mind crept a vision of a lonely, bewhiskered space pilot, his eyes glued to his periscope, maneuvering a badly battered and leaking ship desperately toward his goal.

And she heard faintly the exotic strains of an unearthly song, words that perhaps Flannigan himself was listening to, or singing, even now....

*Why, my love, is fate so cold,
To fill the heart in vain,
Giving today to have and hold,
Only to lose again?
Meaning dies and beauty's left
Alone in desert's waste.
O leave me not of thee bereft!
I follow thee in haste!*

FOR THE SCIENTIST!

By Peter Dakin

IN A NEVER-ending attempt to think up newer and more amusing toys, the toy-makers often turn to basic physical principles for their inspiration. Do you remember the "submersible man", a hollow plastic man immersed in a bottleful of water capped with a tight cover? Press the top of the bottle or squeeze it and the man floats, rises, or sinks according to the pressure. This simple application of Pascal's principle and the basic techniques of the submarine and hydraulic press has amused millions of children—and adults!

Equally fascinating was the "walking spring" popular a few years ago. This large-diameter loosely coiled spring of flat strip metal was capable of literally walking down a flight of stairs in grotesque simulation of a human being. Essentially it behaved according to sound fundamental principles.

There are a host of these toys and gadgets which captivate child and adult alike because they appeal to our basic curiosity and to that deep internal desire to be mystified—and educated. Perhaps no finer example is the gyroscope, less a toy now than a primary tool of science and industry. But no one will forget the toy model, capable of an infinite variety of tricks

and perennially popular. The gyroscope, more than any other toy-gadget, is demonstrative of basic principles of physical science.

Almost as useful and amusing is the familiar yo-yo. This gadget in the hands of a physics professor can make science talk clearly—and out loud! With it conservation of rotational momentum, inertia, moment of inertia, friction, gyroscopics, balance, and a multitude of other physical ideas can be clearly demonstrated to an interested class. The yo-yo is all things to all men—toy and educational tool.

Go through any modern toy store or toy department and you will find a very noticeable trend. While the standard toys are always there, the dolls and the fire engines, the sleighs and the building blocks, they take a back seat to the vast number of educational and scientific toys now available. The future is really written in such terms, for who can tell how many children have obtained their inspiration to become inventors or scientists or technicians from some scientific toy? This healthy trend is on the rise, and if you want to find the future Einsteins and Oppenheimers, look in the toy department!

★ ★ ★

HOW HIGH IS HEAVEN?

By E. Bruce Yaches

PROBABLY one of the most surprising discoveries of the ages was the fact that the sky has a ceiling. Two, rather. Those two ceilings: the Heavside layer along the echoing vault of which wireless words run; and the Appleton layer on which the "short waves" echo, serve a most practical purpose.

Sound waves run along that vault just as they bound along a stone vault. Of course you'd need a tremendous noise to make the sky echo—as when experiments fired about 14,000 pounds of explosives in the vast silence of the Arctic. It was found, at that time, that the sound waves ran up against the vault of the heavens, then bounded back to earth. That would account for the fact that great crashes can generally be heard within a circle of 150 to 200 miles across, then there is a belt of silence, then outside that again the sound is heard, the sound waves coming back to

earth echoing off the vault of the sky.

But of course the most fantastic thing is that this invisible covering over our heads is a protective device of nature—it is so powerfully strong that it throws back waves which, if they got through, would wipe from the face of the earth all existing life—or at least change its form so as virtually to annihilate life as we know it.

Cosmic radiation!

The tremendous invisible currents shot across space from this radiation almost defy possibility. Even with the vault of the sky as a protective device, these rays pierce. Without the covering—chaos!

We used to dream of the dangerous life on earth—the comparative peace of the heavens. Now we know that we live a quiet, sheltered life, as compared to the rush and beat of the hurricanes which exist above the vault. And it is the vault that shelters.

By all means, "Let the welkin ring!"

THE GRAY LEGIONS

By Mallory Storm

One day you may walk out of your door and see Martians marching up the road. If so, remember Dale Swift — and act accordingly!

THE MARTIANS came on Thursday—from somewhere. Nobody knew where they came from; or even that they were Martians. They streamed down all over the face of the earth, maybe; or maybe just into our mountains and woods some seventy-five miles north of New York City.

That was the point. We didn't know. Of all the suffering that followed—all the agony and hardship and bewilderment—that I think was the hardest to take. We didn't know.

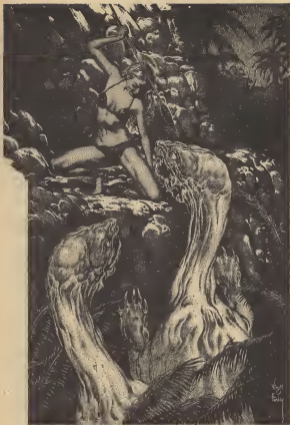
I'd come up into that country to write a book. Things were bad. I hadn't done any writing for a long time. I was living off my last royalties, drinking too much, letting the Greenwich Village gang throw parties and tell me how good I was. But

you're as good as your last book, and mine was on sale in the bargain book stalls for thirty-nine cents. It was time to get going again.

I rented a little white house up here by a lake; the lake was owned, evidently, by a lot of mosquitoes that wouldn't let you come near it. That was good, though. I belonged in the little white house pounding a typewriter.

When I wasn't doing that, I roamed the hills meeting the people. The people! Man! They were fascinating. I began to wonder where I'd been all my life. Not where I belonged certainly. That was up among these hills writing about these primitive folks, quite a few of whom had never seen a radio receiver.

But the Martians came on Thurs-



You've got to know what you're fighting against to be able to really protect yourself

day and I was too busy to think about the people in the hills. I'd slept late that morning and I stepped out on the porch beside the lilac bush just in time to see them marching up the road. That's how it was. I walked out and saw them marching up the road.

My reaction? Well, what were yours the moment you first saw them? The day they marched up your road or your street and into your house? Did you notice first the dryness about them? The look of having lain in a hot desert for days on end until they should have been dead rather than marching up a road in perfect formation.

That was what I saw first; the naked dry hardness of their skin; the lidless yellow eyes; the thin legs and the strange weapons. I blinked and asinine thoughts came into my mind. Asinine and stupid because I still didn't know: *What have we here? The gray legions of death marching back from some shadowy bivouac.*

I didn't know whether it was some gag or an hallucination. After all—did you jump up and down and yell "Martians" when you first saw them?

Four of them turned in at my gate. Four of those now—famous expressionless faces floated close to me. Arms like steel beams covered with old leather gripped me from two sides.

I yelled, "Now listen! What the hell!"

One of the arms went up and one of the strange weapons crashed down on my skull. I went out in a blaze of light.

MY HEAD was in somebody's lap.

It ached miserably. I opened my eyes and saw dark hair and a pale, piquant face above me. The girl sat on the ground with her ankles crossed and my head was in the V of her lap.

I closed my eyes—opened them again, and croaked: "Hello. I know you. You're the girl who lives up on the horse farm. I saw you in the yard the other day."

Her smile was like something pasted across her face; not insincere, but as though her mind were on something else. "Peg Lawrence. You're that writer—Dale Swift—aren't you?"

"Uh-huh."

"We weren't sure you'd not been killed when they brought you here. We could hardly find a pulse beat. Then it got stronger."

"One of those clowns slugged me. What is this? What goes on?"

Her blue eyes were filled with a bewilderment, a fear—just as all the eyes in your town were filled with fear at first. "We don't know. We just don't know. They came and went into all the houses. Some of the people fought and were killed. The rest they brought here."

I dragged myself up into a sitting position. For a while I couldn't see anything because the world spun like a top. I clawed at the girl for support and then there were other hands holding me steady. I opened my eyes. There were an old man and two younger women bending and holding me.

"I'm all right now. Thanks."

I LOOKED the place over as I explored the bump on my head with gingerly fingers. It was a cow pasture, only now the cows were gone and it was full of people. All kinds of people: old and young, men and women, children and infants. Probably twenty acres of flat land. The fence was not for cattle, though. A ten-foot barbed wire netting fastened to brand new steel posts.

And stricken, dazed, wandering people. Just like the ones you saw.

Peggy Lawrence got up too. She

appeared to be under the influence of narcotics. I was dazed too. So stupid I repeated my previous question: "What goes on?"

Peg's blue eyes were flat and glassy. "I wonder what happened to my mother."

"She isn't here?"

"Only father and I. They killed father."

"Good lord!"

Dull eyes. A flat voice. "Mother went to New York this morning—early. I wonder where she is...."

"Safe, probably."

The eyes widened suddenly. Her throat tightened and she set her teeth together: "THEY KILLED MY FATHER!"

The screamed-out words didn't bring too much attention. There were words being screamed out all over the place. I put an arm around her. She threw me off and stood like a young colt hemmed in on all sides. Terrorized. I got hold of her again and felt her strength and the power under the curves of her body.

"Don't. Don't touch me!"

"Stop it. That doesn't help."

I drew her toward a rocky brook that cut the pasture nearby. I pushed her down on a rock and held her while her body stayed tight and then loosened up gradually. Her head drooped.

"It's all right. I'm not going to cry."

"Cry if you want to. It might help."

"You don't know who they are either, then?"

There was despair in her voice, as though just knowing who they were would help a great deal.

"They look like fugitives from a desert chain gang." I dropped my arms and looked around. "Maybe somebody—"

"It's no use. Nobody knows."

"Somebody in this mob must have

been listening to the radio."

"There wasn't anything on the radio. Not on television either. I was watching a cooking class when they came in."

Someone nearby in a huddled group was talking and two words came our way. "...the Russians."

I spoke as though answering him: "The Russians don't go naked."

THERE WAS a stir now at the barn end of the pasture. A group of them had come in and were walking slowly through the huddled prisoners. The group seemed to be a couple of officers and three guards. But the brass were different from the guards only in that they wore a sort of purple sash around their middles. Nothing below—nothing above. Just a purple sash to accentuate the obscenity of their nakedness.

Peggy Lawrence reddened and turned her eyes downward. I saw her embarrassment and tried to shield her with my arm. But at the same time, a voice out of a hard uncovered core in my being spoke wordlessly to her: *This is no time for niceties, girl—no time for lowering your eyes. This is a time to toughen up fast because we've come back down to elementals.*

That was the word. *Elementals*. Even in the chaos of this stunning displacement, some remnant of sanity within me was smart enough to figure out the score. Not modesty now, nor politeness, nor morals, nor anything else. Only survival. *Elementals*.

Knowing nothing, I still felt I had a solid foundation on which to build.

They were looking the people over like cattle. The two officers could have been a pair of auctioneers in a hog pen. One of them prodded a squatting man with his toe. The man scrambled to his feet and scuttled away. The two naked invaders watched with sober, intelligent yellow

eyes and spoke to each other in an alien tongue.

They wandered on, looking over that specimen, this specimen. And talking, always talking. All business, these characters. They came to a blonde girl of possibly twenty—one out of several dozen blonde girls in the cowering mass. One of the officers took her by the hair and lifted her up. She had been partially stripped and very little of her dress was left. The officer called some facial detail to his companion's attention. There didn't seem to be any lewdness nor lust in the manner of either. They seemed only curious.

But nearby, a young man went mad.

He came charging in, shrieking, a rock in his hand. He got close enough to use the rock, but was not able to do so. One of the guards reached out two dead-gray arms and picked the young man off the ground and threw him.

He threw the young man at least fifteen feet straight through the air. The youth landed horribly, his back arching down against the sharp edge of a boulder. The crunch of bone came just before his scream. The blonde girl screamed also—tore from the officer's grasp—ran to the young man.

BUT I WAS watching the naked invaders—and learning things. This was no time for useless heroics. We were back to elementals now and somebody had to learn fast. And there were some things to discover.

These monstrosities, whoever they were, rated us strictly as animals. That was obvious. Their impersonal attitude was entirely genuine. They were not trying to show contempt; it was not an act. They rated us as cattle.

And they were smart. They were allowing themselves no moment of triumph. They were going about a

deadly business and they weren't anybody's fools.

If they had hearts it was strictly for their own kind or those they considered as equals. Nor were they sex maniacs in any sense of the word. During their walk I'd seen them pass beauty on all sides with scarcely a glance.

And what would this observation—this knowledge—get me? I didn't have the least idea. I was sure of only one thing. If I had been walking through a cowed mob of these gray creatures, they'd have been studying me as though life depended on it.

After a while, they selected an elderly man and a middle-aged woman. They motioned to the guards. The guards prodded the two back toward the barn.

For questioning? I wondered.

The next incident relative to the invaders came about an hour before sundown. From somewhere, a loud-speaker blared forth in English. Either they had learned our language, or there was a Quisling in the deal.

"You will all come forward and face the barn. All of you. Come forward to this end of the enclosure."

No guards came in with whips. There was only the voice. For a time, no movement was apparent in the mass of prisoners. Only silence. Then a slow, turgid movement as of a stream of lazy water moving chips toward one end of the dirty pond.

Again the voice: "Move forward, all of you. Come to this end of the enclosure."

It took about five minutes and the invaders were patient. When we were all crowded around the barn as directed, one of the gray men appeared in the hay-loft opening of the barn. He stood silent, obscene legs spread, arms folded, looking down at us; seemingly studying us musingly. Then someone handed him a microphone.

He lifted it and spoke: "You will a'l look at me. You will all look at my face and listen to what I have to say."

He paused for about twenty seconds before he went on: "We are now going to put a lethal charge of electricity into the fence around this enclosure. I wish to warn you that touching a strand of the barbed wire will result an instant death. If any of you wishes to die in this manner, you will be perfectly free to do so. You have been warned. That is all."

The creature started into the rear shadows, then turned back. "Another thing. There will be no food until tomorrow morning. You will be fed once a day, upon each morning following."

Now he disappeared for good.

PEGGY and I, who had stuck together by some common consent, moved backward with the crowd as it spread again over the pasture. As we walked, I noticed that the guard which had surrounded the place, stationed at intervals outside the fence, had formed into a unit that was marching toward the barn.

"They plan to keep us here for some time, anyhow," I said.

"You gathered that from what he told us about the meals?"

"Yes. I wonder if they'll give us any information?"

Peggy's hand was co'd in mine. "Do you think it would do any good if I asked one of them about my mother?"

"I doubt it. There can't be very many of them that know English."

Later, as we sat again by the brook, I challenged my own statement. Why had I said few of them would know our language? Because, I told myself, they were obviously alien. Okay—alien. I'd been all over the world. I knew every terrestrial species that walked on two legs. Therefore, on the basis of my own reasoning, I had a right to state a fact.

"They're from somewhere out in space," I told Peggy.

"From space? But how—?"

"I don't know. Let's hope we find out some day."

It was scant comfort, but it helped. It gave me a solid foundation upon which to build my questions.

The sun went down and I thanked fate it was warm summer. There would be no suffering from the weather. There would be hunger—especially among—

A quick resolution—one to make me feel warm, possibly a little cocky. I got up off my rock and patted Peggy's arm. "You stay here a minute. I'll be right back."

I hurried away, threading a path through the crowd until I was standing under the open loft door from which the gray man had spoken. I yelled, "Hey—you up there! You with the microphone."

The gray man in view around the barn and the farm house turned in idle interest. Nothing happened upstairs.

"You up there. I want to talk to you."

I wondered if the answer would come from one of those strange weapons.

"You up there!"

The gray man appeared. His inscrutable face caught the light of the setting sun. It made him look like a stone devil.

"What is it?"

"The children and the babies down here can't wait until morning. They need milk. They've got to have something to eat. Can't you do us a favor and see that they're fed?"

He remained silent, staring down at me.

"Milk!" I yelled. "White stuff. There's probably some in the house in the refrigerator. We need several cans of it—big cans you'll find on a dairy farm."

After a thick silence, he asked,

"How often do your young need feeding?"

"Three times a day—oftener if they're very small. Can we have some milk?"

He didn't reply. He stood there for a full minute looking over the enclosure. Then he turned and walked away.

I went slowly back through the groups of prisoners and sat down beside Peggy. She laid a hand on my arm. "That was very brave of you."

I shook the hand off. Somehow, her praise annoyed me. "Other people would have asked. They just hadn't thought of it yet."

I DIDN'T want to talk at that moment. There was too much going through my mind. Questions.

What did they want of us? Obviously this was an invasion. Yet they hadn't slaughtered us as they could easily have done. Why not? Not out of pity, that I knew. I'd seen them throw a man against a rock and break his back. Then why were we wanted?

This brought on wonderings about the scope of the attack. It was more than local, beyond all doubt. Otherwise, there would have been hell popping in this area long before now. Then how large was their bridgehead? The eastern seacoast? Wider than that, or there would at least be U.S. observation planes functioning.

I gave up conjecturing, took Peggy's hand and began walking. We moved casually about until we came to a group of fifteen or twenty prisoners who seemed to be talking more than the others. I pulled Peggy down on the grass at the edge of the group and we listened.

"Newt saw the ship. In a pasture over by Schulkill."

"One? There were a dozen."

"They came with no moon. Dark.

They dragged us out of bed."

"Joe got the shotgun and fired it. They killed him with that funny little gun they carry."

"No blood. No wound."

"I'm getting hungry."

"They tore Bea's nightgown—threw her into the yard."

"They wouldn't let her get her clothes."

"When will the army come?"

"Ha—the army will be here."

"The National Guard."

A laugh. "I belong to the National Guard. I'm here."

"Why don't they wear some clothes? It's...indecent. Innocent children..."

Elementals, lady.

We were jerked out of it by a scream. It was dark now and the lights of several fires weren't enough to carry. All heads turned.

"Over by the fence!"

A LONG, sick, choked wailing. I pulled Peggy to her feet and we ran towards it. A girl in a bathing suit. Bikini. Bra and shorts. Dragged out of some lake—away from an early morning swim—and brought along.

She lay on the ground, face tight, teeth set, eyes wide. Slaving. Legs stretching wide and hard. Then a gradual softening of flesh and muscle.

"She went crazy all of a sudden."

"Ran straight against the fence. I couldn't stop her."

Peg and I walked slowly back to the creek. Peg's face buried in my shoulder as she staggered along. I sat her down and after a while she stopped sobbing and quivering.

"Did you notice anything strange about that girl?"

Peggy raised her head. Her eyes questioned as the firelight flickered on the shine of her tears. "No—I—I didn't look."

"I did. She was electrocuted."

"Don't—"

"I've got to. Listen—she was electrocuted and yet there wasn't a burn on her body. Isn't that pretty odd? When a person is killed with electricity, it fries them—burns them up. All she had was scratches on her breast from her own fingernails."

"Dale—don't, please."

"I'm sorry. You're very tired. You need sleep."

"I can't sleep."

"Yes, you can. We'll find a place."

I took her hand and we wandered around and located a grassy nook under an evergreen tree. "This will do. It's not crowded here. You lie down and close your eyes. I'll be here."

We lay side by side on the grass looking up into the dark tree above. Silent, stiff. Five minutes and I thought Peg was asleep. She hadn't moved. Then I heard the sobbing, ever so faint, down in her breast where she was trying to cover it up—hide it—smother it. I touched her.

"Peg. . . ."

The sobs wouldn't smother. They were too hot. She threw herself at me in a single explosion of grief. I caught her and held her and let her cry. All her being a hot, smoking channel through which grief poured like a torrent. I didn't say anything. I just held her and time went by and after a while I knew she was asleep. Exhausted.

I laid her down but I didn't pull away until her breathing was even, lifting her breast in rhythm. Then I lay down too and closed my eyes.

When I slept, I dreamed of my mountain people up in the hills.

DREAMED of them and there was a hand over my mouth. Another holding my arms down. I came awake in rank panic, but there was a harsh, dry whisper: "Take it easy, younker.

Don't fuss up. Everything's all right."

He put his smelly face so close I couldn't miss it. The mattress-whiskers stained with tobacco juice. The amiable grin.

But the tobacco stench was attar of roses to me and the grin—in the light of an early-lowering moon—more classic than the Mona Lisa smile.

"Josh! They got you too?"

One of my mountain men. I'd gone one day off the cement and onto the black-top; off the black-top and into a road made up of two ruts overgrown with grass. When the ruts ended, I got out of the car and began walking. Into a footpath that ended also, and around me there was nothing but woods as primeval as when the Indians called them home.

I walked on, enchanted, until I got hungry and realized I was lost. I said, "This is absurd. The road is right down there and all I have to do is go back and get into my car and go home and get a can of sardines out of the ice box.

Like so much hell.

I was lost in the deep woods seventy-five miles from Times Square. I walked on and almost jumped out of my skin. A voice like a dry husk: "What are you doing around these parts, younker?"

Josh was leaning against a tree not five feet away. He was small—top-heavy with a growth of whiskers that covered all but his eyes and cheek bones. Under the mat his jaws were moving rhythmically on a wad of tobacco. He leaned on a rifle and wore a pale blue shirt and a pair of levis.

"I guess I'm lost."

The cackle. "I guess you are, younker. I been watching you sashay around in a circle for an hour or more. You'll have a path beat pretty soon."

"Would you mind telling me where I am?"

"'Bout eight miles up on Stormy.

You got some to go yet—to get to the top.”

“Maybe you’d show me the way back to my car. I’d be willing to pay you.”

“Not me. I’m heading home for grub. You can come along. I got two youngers myself. Maybe one of them wants to make a dollar.”

JOSH LIVED with his two sons in a log house up the mountain. Lee was eighteen, lean and hard and calm of eye; long of hair, but not as loquacious as his brother Tarp who said, “Hya,” when we walked up the hill.

Lee was dishing beans out of a pot onto tin plates, setting them on a rude outdoor table. He didn’t even look around.

Josh said, “Dig out another pan. Got me an outlander. Gotta find out if there’s a bounty on him. Haw-haw-haw.”

I stayed all night and learned about them, but it was like digging in granite with a spoon. They lived in the hills and had neighbors who also lived in the hills. They carried .22 rifles mostly and could knock the eye out of a squirrel at a hundred yards.

They drank gin—doctored up in a way the devil must have taught them. That was why I stayed all night. They’d have had to carry me home.

“We’re mountain folk,” old Josh croaked, “and we ain’t beholden to nobody.” That was after many visits, when I knew him well.

And now again that croaking laugh as Josh took his hard hand off my mouth and answered my question. “Got me? What you talking about, youngker. I come looking around for you. With all these varmints clustering around, I think you’d be better off up on Stormy.”

“But how did you get in? The fence is charged with electricity.”

“What fence? There ain’t no fence.

Can’t for the life o’ me figure out why all these folks is hanging around.”

“Josh! We’re caged here like cattle.”

“That’s interesting. I just walked in and looked around ’till I found you.”

There was a touch of insanity about all this.

“Come on,” Josh said. “We shouldn’t stick around none. We should sort of back out o’ here.”

“I can’t come alone. I’ve got a friend.”

“Bring him along.”

“It’s a girl.”

“All right. Bring her along. My youngkers ain’t rampant. They’ve seen fillies before.”

I awakened Peggy as Josh had awakened me—with a hand over her mouth. She took it surprisingly well.

“We’re going out of here,” I told her. “A friend of mine has come for us. Be very quiet.”

We followed Josh through the sleeping and half-sleeping groups. It was like following a shadow. I held my breath as we came to the fence. It was there. The faint moonlight glittered against the steel posts on which the wire was strung.

BUT JOSH walked right through it—passed beyond it as though it did not exist.

Then I knew! *It didn’t exist.* It was a phantom of the mind. A phantom of a thousand minds. But a phantom that could kill!

Josh turned and I heard his corn-husk whisper. “What’s keeping you? Ain’t you coming with me?”

“Yes—yes—but just a minute. You’ll have to wait a minute, Josh.”

I turned all my attention on Peggy. “Listen, darling—get it and get it fast. That fence isn’t there at all. We just think it is. It’s nothing but a reflection from our own minds.”

Peg shrank back. “Dale! Are you

mad? That girl we saw killed."

"Yes—but no burns. Don't you remember? This is how it works. Remember how the gray man made us all come to the barn and look at him while he told us about the fence. They're smart—very smart, Peg. They're way ahead of us in mental abilities. While he was talking, he suggested the electrified fence to everyone of us. Hypnotised it into our minds. It's not there but that girl was killed from *believing*—don't you understand? These creatures don't bother to build a fence. They merely put one into our minds and we're trapped."

Peg was more perceptive than I expected. She said, "But Dale—the fence was there when we came—before he told us about it."

She had a point, but still I knew I was right. "That may be true. Maybe they put the picture in the minds of these people when they brought them in. But you just saw Josh walk through it. That's proof, Peg. Together with the other things. Josh wasn't here so he wasn't hypnotized. The fence doesn't exist for him."

The old man was bewildered. "I don't know what you two are yapping about. You must be some way touched."

I said, "Peg—you watch me. I'm going to walk through the place where we think we see a fence. We're going to walk around a little before we go through and I want you to keep your eyes tight closed. Don't open them until I tell you to. And all the time keep thinking, 'It's only in my mind. It's only in my mind.'"

"I don't think I need to do that, Dale. If you can walk through it—so can I."

All right. But remember: there's no fence there. Don't flinch when you come to it. It's all in your mind."

I TOOK her hand and we walked through the fence. Peg didn't flinch. But she closed her eyes and raised her chin as we hit the imaginary barbed-wire strands. I don't know what went on in her mind but in mine was a thought: *What manner of creatures are we up against?*

Peggy opened her eyes and they were filled with wonder. She turned and looked. "It's—it's gone. Nothing there to hold all those people. We must tell them."

I pulled her back sharply. "Nothing of the kind!"

"But it's so heartless—letting them believe—"

"It's best for them. If they started running, those gray devils would probably shoot them down like rabbits."

"But so heartless," Peg repeated.

"Angel, the time has passed when kindness can be considered. It's a luxury now. No more thinking with your heart. This is a fight for survival and only the brutal have a chance."

At that moment there was a commotion over by the barn—a rattling of heavy objects. In a flash we were face-down on the ground—pushed by Josh who had moved like a steel spring.

"Quiet," he hissed. "Your standing here jawing has put us in a spot. We ought to be up in the woods by now."

We lay motionless. After a few moments we cautiously raised our heads. Lights had been spotted on the barn door and a squad of gray men were carrying milk cans out into the pasture.

"It's food for the children," Peg whispered. "The leader did what you asked, Dale!"

"Only because they want us for something. They don't want us to die. I wish I knew what they had in mind."

"That's easy," Josh cut in. "You ain't very smart, younker."

"Do you know the answer?"

"Sure. They want slaves. They'll need food and somebody's got to work the land."

I hoped nobody could see my red face. Of course that was it! I'd been so damned clever at analyzing things, yet I couldn't dope out a simple one like that.

The lights went out and the gray men went back into the barn leaving the milk cans. They'd brought the milk but they weren't going to feed the babies.

"Let's go," Josh whispered. "Single file. Keep right behind me. Put the filly in the middle."

The moon was gone now and it was like walking into a black wall. Every step was with foreboding—fear of tripping or pitching into a hole.

BUT THE going was smooth and after a while we gained confidence in our trail-maker. We must have walked for almost an hour when Josh stopped and said, "It gets tougher from here on, but we better keep going. We'll walk slower and put the filly behind. You better take her hand."

I was amazed. "You mean you can see in this pitch darkness?"

"I dunno. Maybe it's that. Anyhow, I know where I'm going."

We were in deep woods now and at intervals there was Josh's rasping voice ahead: "Hole here—watch it.... Low branches—hold 'em or they'll slap you in the puss." At intervals we could hear the tinkling of fast mountain water but we didn't cross any.

Finally Peg's plea in the darkness: "Please! I'm—about done."

"We've got to stop, Josh or—wait a minute! I'll carry Peg. That way we can keep on going."

The oldster snorted. "Oh yeah? Who do you think you are—Dan'l Boone? Gimme the filly. Come here,

sis."

Josh grunted once from sudden exertion. I couldn't see what was going on but I could visualize. Peggy was at least five feet six inches and must have weighed a hundred and thirty. Josh couldn't have tipped the beam at one-twenty. I waited for the crash.

But the old man's footsteps continued at a steady clip. And as he kept on giving me tips on rocks and holes and branches, there was no sign of extra exertion in his voice.

I was beginning to tire. My legs ached and my chest was full of fire. It was a matter of pride now, however. I'd have dropped in my tracks before letting on.

Grimly we plodded through the night.

Until Josh said, "Well, damned if we didn't make it." Then he called out, "Show a light, boys."

There were sudden sounds not more than ten feet away, a dark covering of some sort was drawn away from a doorway and a shadow loomed inside. It was the cabin.

Josh walked in and set Peggy down. Now I waited for him to drop from exhaustion. Instead, he took his .22 from Peg who had been carrying it and hung the weapon on the wall. He said, "Kind of imagine you youngers could use some grub. I sure can."

There were two oil lamps on the table. The table had only three legs, one corner of it being propped on a shelf in the log wall. The floor was earth packed solid with a few high spots that would trip you up if you weren't wary. One wall was blocked off by a pair of bunk beds upon which were mattresses and bedclothes colorless with grime. There was a single cot beside the fireplace.

WITHOUT further ceremony, Josh snatched up a plate and went to the fireplace and ladled a heap of

beans out of an old iron pot. He said, "Grab a dish' and dig in younkers. Beans is right nourishing. They stick to your bowels. Dig in."

I glanced at Peggy with some apprehension, but my fears were groundless. She was staring at the bean pot as though it contained the rarest of viands imaginable. She grabbed a tin plate off the table. "I don't have to be asked twice," she said.

Lee stood by the bunks leaning on his .22. He hadn't said a word. He watched Peggy bend over and ladle beans out of the pot. He turned his eyes away when Josh, his mouth crammed, said, "Wonder how Tarp's making out?"

My nerves were raw—on edge. I looked up to ask, "Did something happen to Tarp?"

Josh went right on eating. "I sent him off on a circle of the mountain to talk to folks. We gotta find out what they want to do. Sit around and get picked off or—" The rest was unintelligible as he had again crammed his mouth full.

"Tarp come back from the west swing about noon," Lee said. "Old Sam Flinch got killed by the creat'res. They must o' took Mable 'cause she wasn't around nowhere."

"Knew Sam would get into trouble someday, Josh grumbled, "living down near those summer outlanders. Should of been up in the hills with the rest of us."

"Tarp said some of 'em took to the idea o' getting together at Black Pond. Some was kind o' stiff-backed."

"Okay," Josh replied. "If they want to fight this war by theirselves, let 'em do it."

"Josh," I asked, "how did you find out about what had happened?"

"There's a o'ld Indian named Hot Ear wanders around the mountain. No telling how he gets wind of things, but this morning he swung up here and

told us some funny looking outlanders had skated in down below in fat-bellied airplanes and was raising hell in general. Said they was killing and cor-raïng like the French and British did in the old Iriquois days." Josh went off on another thought-track and waved a spoon at his tall son.

"You know, Lee—he was damned well right. Never saw such funny looking critters in all my days. Plumb naked as jay birds and like they'd been roasted over a slow fire." He stopped and grinned proudly. "Got me one down in the low'ands. Just about dark it was. He must of wandered away, cause he was standing in a glade looking at the corpse down by Blarney's Slip. I pussied up to fifty yards and put a slug right into the top end of his spine."

"You killed one?" I asked excitedly.

"Sure did."

"You took his gun?"

"What'd I want the danged thing for? Don't know how to use it. Might hurt somebody."

"You should have gotten it!"

"And you better look to your filly. She's dead beat."

I TURNED to see Peggy lying across the table with her head on her arms.

"Put her in one of the bunks. Lee and me can bed down outside if you think she'd be senseetive."

I picked Peg up in my arms. Her head fell back and she had all the appearance of a tired child too far gone to be awakened. A wave of tenderness swept me as I put her gently into the bunk. Then I myself dropped wearily down on the bunk edge. I could have slept on a picket fence.

Josh had finally finished his supper. He got up, wiped a hand across his whiskers. He stood motionless for a moment, then said, "You really want that outlander's weapon?"

"I think it might come in handy."

"Okay, Lee. You run down and get it if it's still there. They might not have come on the creat're yet."

Lee had been covertly watching Peggy out of the corner of his eyes. Startled by his father's words, the youth jerked his eyes around in surprise. After a moment, he shrugged. "Okay, Pop." He took his gun off a nail on the wall and slouched out of the cabin.

"And you better get some sleep too, younker. Ain't no telling what'll come up tomorrow. Me—I'll put my pants against the wall outside and kind of sleep with one eye open. Don't think any of them creat'res can find us, but we won't take no chances."

I was dizzy with exhaustion. At that moment I didn't care much what happened. I climbed into the upper bunk and was asleep before Josh had taken his rifle off the wall.

THE DETAILS of transition are sometimes unbelievable—sometimes boring. But the starker ones—the exalted, and sometimes the ludicrous ones—you remember.

That's how it was with me in remembering what could be called the mobilization. I learned much about these mountain people.

I LEARNED HOW THEY FOUGHT: There were five of us reconnoitering the woods—Josh and I, with three neighboring mountaineers—all of a cut—and it was in my mind that they were ageless. Given leather pants and shirts for the levis and the faded blues, they could have been scouting for British advance guards in a different America—an America not yet born.

They moved in utter silence and I was learning, too. Five shadows drifting through the trees—four of them rich in the woodcraft of survival or

sudden death.

I had learned to watch them—to do what they did. Most important, to freeze when they froze. Josh stopped suddenly with one foot in the air half a step forward. Four rifles came up in a motion held by four shadows as stiff as trees.

I felt suddenly forlorn, hopeless. I had heard nothing. There was no wind and the dead silence was like a blanket. How could one learn to hear soundless danger? It was uncanny.

Josh lowered his gun. "Hot Ear," he said.

Hot Ear? I'd have sworn there wasn't a soul within ten miles. Then Josh turned, looked over my shoulder, and said, "What's the lay, Dirty Legs?"

He must have sprung up out of the ground, but there he was and he could have killed me four times while I stood flat-footed thinking I was alone. He was a big Indian with straight black greasy hair. He wore the uniform of the mountain folk—levis and a faded blue shirt. He carried a slightly heavier rifle than the rest and I got the impression he'd been to school sometime in his life.

He talked only to Josh: "By damn! Hell's apoppin'. Got me six spooks parked down by the pond. You want to help?"

"They got those funny guns?"

"Phooey! Damn spooks sittin' in tall grass. Poor insurance risks."

"Let's go." Josh stopped then and regarded me dubiously. "Think you can keep from falling over your feet?"

I wasn't insulted. Josh was too far out of my class for that. "I'll try."

We went single file. I was the caboose. Hot Ear led the way. Five shadows and a caboose. We came finally to the fringe of the woods on lower ground. Hot Ear sank down into the swale. I crawled close. I

wanted to be in on the planning, the laying out of the action-pattern.

THERE WAS no planning. Not a word was said. Josh pushed down on my knee, an eloquent order to stay where I was. Then the five mountain men went down on their bellies and began wriggling and pretty soon they had vanished into the hip-high grass.

I waited, feeling lonely. Down below by a small pond I could see half a dozen gray men. They seemed uncertain as to what to do. They'd been given some kind of orders and were at a loss as to how to carry them out.

That made no difference. They were through carrying out orders. One of them, evidently a corporal, raised the strange looking hand weapon and held it against his head. This looked like suicide. Was he going to kill himself?

He stood that way, motionless as though afraid to pull the trigger.

A hair-raising scream and five mountaineers grew up out of the grass not fifteen feet from the alien warriors. Hot Ear's gun thundered. The lead warrior went down.

There was no more shooting. Just swift terrible death. Josh went through space to wrap a body scissors around his man from the rear. He reached around the gray throat—jammed in the knife—all but decapitated the man. The others died as swiftly. Carnage to bring fierce joy to the heart of a bystander.

They wiped their knives on grass—rolled the bodies over by the pressure of a foot. I ran down the hill after that strange hand gun.

Josh looked up and grinned. Hot Ear was on his knees, pinching, testing. "By damn! It's not pants and shirts. It's their skin." He stared at a dead gray man. "I could skin this one out and make me some clothes.

Tougher than horsehide."

I picked up the alien's weapon and held it as he had held it, against my head. There were crackling sounds—then gibberish the gray men would have understood had they been alive. Josh was peering at the gun. "Wonder if it shoots."

I turned the barrel toward the water and pressed what appeared to be the trigger. A sizzling hole appeared in the pond. The water boiled and dry grass on the pond-edge caught fire.

"Throw it in the pond," Josh said.

"Throw it away?"

"Hell, yes. That thing'd start a woods fire and burn us all plumb to hell."

I put the weapon against his ear. He cocked an eye and said, "Well, I'll be damned! A radio in a gun butt! What'll they think of next?"

I looked at the gray dead men. I'd learned how mountaineers fought. We were down to grim elementals.

I LEARNED HOW TO MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF: They had gathered at Black Pond—straggled in out of the woods with their wives and children and they sat around in groups; not saying anything—not doing anything—just sitting there.

It bothered me. Sheep waiting for the slaughterer's knife. There would be tragedy if something wasn't done. Poor backward folks unable to conceive what had happened—what dark peril lay waiting to cut them down.

They needed the spark. Something had to be done and I was the man to do it. I spoke to Josh. He'd just set down the gin jug and was wiping his whiskers.

He got to his feet and called out, "This here feller is an outlander friend of mine. A pretty good feller and he wants to say something. Keep the younkersh quiet and listen."

I GOT TO my feet, inspired by the press of duty. I would not fail. I started speaking: "It is an honor to be with you people in this time of danger. Stark tragedy has fallen upon us. Heaven only knows where these gray fiends came from. Possibly some day we'll find out. Also, we have no idea of how large the invasion is. The whole nation—the whole world may be in their grip."

The mountaineers stared in silence. Their interest warmed me. I was getting to them. All they needed was leadership.

"But I know that long odds mean nothing to you people. Your ancestors fought at Lexington. They faced great odds at Ticonderoga. You are of the same mettle, my friends. You will not flinch from your duty. And that duty is *fight—fight—fight!*"

I doubled my fist to show them what I meant and stopped to measure the effect. There was dead silence. Then the voice of a wiry mountaineer who passed the gin along and spoke to Josh: "This youngster ain't very well informed, is he?"

Hot Ear was sitting nearby. He said, "By damn! Ain't heard a speech like that since the State Trooper tried to get me back to the reservation."

Josh got up and took me by the arm. "Come on, youngster. I been kind of neglecting you."

He led me away and I heard a voice speaking in wonder: "He don't even know we're fighting the Martians."

We went down by the water and Josh said, "We been getting scraps of information, youngster—the radio and such."

"Radio!"

"Uh-huh. Henry Chunt's little filly's got one of them amatoor radio sets. She talks to people and they talk back. The filly's been getting the lay from

all over the world."

I was suddenly sick from humiliation.

"Yeah—they're Martians all right. They come down everywhere. They got a muckle of funny weepsons and as near as we can get it, they've tied up every nation on earth. It was a big push for sure. They knocked down our airplznes with some kind of magnetism. Nobody's figured it out yet."

"You got all this up in these hills—"

"Seems like there's still a couple of resistance pockets. They got French Army bottled up somewhere in the Per'nees and the Yankees are making a stand with their backs to the Rockies. Outside of that, things is tough."

"Then it's hopeless!"

"Wouldn't say that, youngster. In a deal like this you can't tell what might turn up. We got about three hundred men here—good men that know how to fight and we won't have to worry much up in these hills."

"Not worry! Good lord! When they get around to it, they'll come up and wipe us out."

"Don't quite think so, youngster. We been finding out some things. These Martians can't get us except in one way. That's by fire, and they don't want to burn down these woods. That's something that's been noticed about them. Chunt's filly got the lay on New York and Chicago. Funny thing is these Martians don't want no destruction. They won't even break a window if they can help it. And a forest fire in the Black Hills nigh panicked them."

"Then they'll send in an army."

"Haw. What they don't know about woods fighting would fill six books. Why, Simpson's panty-boy got one with a .22. They ain't so tough when you play checkers with them on your own board."

MY HUMILIATION was almost too great to bear.

"And don't worry about these folks sitting around like ducks, younker. I took me a little census a while back and we laid out about three hundred of their stragglers in all. Mizz Johnson even got one on her back stoop with a shotgun. Fired through a window and cut him right in two."

At that moment there came sound from the higher ground—soft voices singing. The words came drifting down on the breeze:

Onward Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war—
With the cross of Jesus—

"That's the women folks," Josh said. "It's a caution. Get three women together in these hills and they start a prayer meeting."

"I can't go back and face them, Josh. After making an ass of myself."

"Don't worry about that none. These folks like a good laugh as well as the next party, but they don't hold onto it long. Me—I gotta go back and salvage my gin jug. I'll see you by the grub table."

I walked up onto the high ground to let the breeze cool my face.

I LEARNED OF THE STRANGE AND GHASTLY WEAPON THE MARTIANS BROUGHT WITH THEM. Peggy had taken well to the woods. She had pitched into mountain living with an intentness of purpose that revealed her objective—the hiding of her grief—the living with it—the retention of normalcy under stark emotional pressure.

There was a pool near Josh's cabin, a rustically beautiful place where Peggy spent many hours with a fish-spear. She became skillful at the art of spearing four and five-pound bass lurking in the crystal waters.

It was early afternoon when I heard the scream—Peggy shrieking out in mortal terror from the pool. I snatched up the .22 Josh had given me and pelted up the hill through the trees. The forest formed a thick hedge around the pool and Peggy's scream came again and again as I narrowed the intervening distance. Then I burst through the hedge and stood transfixed.

Peggy was on a rock ledge above the pool. She wore the two-piece bathing suit she'd made from a calico dress given her by a mountain woman. In her hand was her fish spear—in her eyes stark terror. And coming up out of the pool—

—a clot of ghastliness almost beyond comprehension; a slimy, green two-headed beast almost formless in its bulky corpulence. Its glutinous eyes were fixed upon Peggy and there was in them a hypnotic stare that held her motionless with her spear raised. The beast came higher out of the water and its two heads split open into sharp-toothed maws seeking to pull her down from the ledge.

I RACED around the pool, brought up the .22 and fired at the closest head. Nothing happened; nothing was changed. The great green thing flowed ever upward in soundless, slithering motion. I fired again and again until the magazine of my .22 was empty. Then I hurled the gun itself. The weapon went on right into and through the thing without bothering it.

Then I knew.

"Peggy!" I screamed. "It isn't there. Close your eyes and tell yourself it isn't there!"

She must have thought me mad if she even heard me.

"It's like the fence, Peggy! It was put into your mind like some kind of germ when the Martians captured you."

She had backed against the rock wall now and there was no escape. Her eyes met mine in frantic appeal. "It's not like the fence," she babbled. "It's real—real. I can smell its breath!"

Then she came close to cancelling out my whole argument. "If—if they only put it into my mind, how can you see it, too?"

I was on the ledge beside her now. I took her in my arms and felt her flesh quivering on the brink of madness. My mind raced. There was logic in what she said. How could I see it, too? The same hallucination at the same instant—that is, if it *was* a hallucination.

The bulging eyes and the fetid maw were close to us. The monstrosity seemed to be taking its time now that we were hopelessly trapped. I had to think—think fast, I was certain of my premise, but death still slobbered scant inches away.

A sudden idea: "Peg—tell me. What does it look like? Describe it—quick!"

One of the heads came in closer. The huge jaws snapped shut and the teeth clashed with a ringing sound.

"Quick, Peg! Describe it!"

"Its—its feathers are orange. It has black wings with all the feathers gone at the tips. A hooked beak and great claws!" Peg covered her eyes and sobbed as hysteria gripped her.

I laughed. "I see something entirely different. A huge green snake with two heads. I was right, Peg! Hallucinations. Mine is different from yours. Look. I'll prove it's only in our minds!"

I took a step forward. It was like walking against a sharp sword pressed against my heart. I had only logic to go on. The beast looked as real as the rock on which we stood. But I walked into it, just as I'd walked into the fence.

And it was gone.

Peg's eyes were open. She was

staring and I could see that her monstrous bird was gone² also. Her eyes rolled and she fell into a faint.

"BUT DALE, why do they do it?

You really can't frighten people to death. Not very many, that is. You can terrorize them, but—"

"I don't know why or how they do it, Peg. Maybe they have the power of creating these images in order to put people off their guard. Suppose they were advancing against one of our armies. With a vanguard of conjured-up horrors, they could certainly throw their enemy off guard—put him at a disadvantage."

"Maybe the monsters can kill if a person doesn't get them out of mind. That girl died back in the enclosure."

"Yes, maybe they can kill. But you'd better rest now. And if you see another one, remember how to fight it. Deny its existence and it vanishes".

I LEARNED OF TREACHERY:

The gathering at Black Pond showed no signs of dispersing, even on the second day. Some old abandoned buildings were brought into use for shelters but, for the most part, the people lived under the sun in the daytime and under the stars at night.

There were lengthy conferences among the men as to what shape their resistance should take. Some voiced a preference for a direct attack on the various garrisons set up by the Martians in the lower country.

Josh argued against this: "Let's not go feeling our oats. We got to go in strictly for skirmishes. We ain't strong enough to face an army of them leather devils. Keep nipping at them. Cut off their scouting parties. Put the fear of God into them, and wait for something to turn up."

It sounded to me like the sensible procedure, but some were against it: "What for do we have to hide out in

the hills? Looks downright yellow to me. I'm for going down and taking the measure of them rapscllions."

Only Hot Ear had no opinion. His sole comment was, "Damn fine gin here. Count me in."

They seemed to have forgotten my speech. There were no allusions to it and I was accepted on the reserved basis of all outlanders.

IT WAS on the morning of the third day that disaster came without warning. Just after dawn, a thin scream from one of the women and one wall of a building disappeared in searing flame. The camp flared into desperate activity as the Martians were sighted—several platoons of them swinging around one corner of the lake.

Now, all the buildings were afire from strange white flames that spewed from the muzzles of the Martian guns and seemed hot enough to melt metal. Women and children died quickly—turned into charred shapeless things.

Brought suddenly awake, I breathed a prayer of gratitude that Peggy was back in Josh's cabin helping a mountaineer woman have a baby.

Josh, who had been sleeping beside me, rolled over with a curse. "What in hell happened to the sentries?" he yelled. Then he was on his belly sighting along the barrel of his .22.

A .22 is a small gun. At a hundred yards it must be fired accurately to be a dangerous weapon. The Martians came in a wedge. I heard Josh's rifle crack in my ear. The lead Martian flung a hand to his right eye and pitched forward.

Other guns were working now. On my other side Hot Ear had come alive and his 30-30 roared out. A Martian doubled over his stomach and went down. "By damn," Hot Ear

grunted. "Get 'em quick or we're cooked. One woods fire comin' up."

Josh's rifle was empty. He snatched mine, asking, "You still got that funny gun we took down by the pond?"

I took it from my pocket.

"Go ahead and use it on the bastards. I didn't think they'd have the guts to burn down the woods!"

I raised the gun and sighted down the barrel. Then Josh's hand was on my arm. "Never mind. Ain't no need of it. This fire's going to be bad enough as it is."

Josh was right. The Martians had made the same mistake as the British red-coats so long ago. A solid phalanx—a wall of warriors moving forward against the finest sharpshooters on earth. They had been cut down with such merciless accuracy of fire that only a few remained standing; a few bewildered terror-stricken Martians who even now went lumbering away as they had come.

Hot Ear came to his feet. His gun lay discarded but in his right fist was a glittering knife—a six-inch blade. His eyes were bright. "By damn! Gonna get me some beef!"

Two or three other mountaineers followed him as he paddled off into the woods.

The dry grass around the demolished buildings was burning now—moving ahead of the wind toward the thick forest. "Get old sacks, sticks, take off your shirts," Josh yelled. "We got to beat out that fire or we're goners."

There was fear in his eyes and even as I worked like a coolie against the flames I couldn't help considering the irony of this. The Martians had come out of the sky with weapons far beyond our knowledge—in ships beyond our power to duplicate. Yet the only thing hereabouts that had struck fear into Josh's heart was an old-fashioned forest fire.

DOWN THE hill, in grisly heaps, lay the Martians. To me, they presented a hazard. I said, "Josh, hadn't somebody better go down and check? If any of those devils are still alive they might open up on us."

Josh snorted and continued pounding the flames with an old gunny sack. "Don't worry none. Any Martian that dropped is dead. Ain't nobody in this crowd that has to take a second look after getting his bead. Keep on pounding this damn fire."

We finally got it out. With only a smoldering arc left, a bucket line from the pond killed it even to the last wisps of smoke in the charred grass.

Josh straightened and I was struck by his changed appearance. He looked old and haggard and tired. There was an icy misery in his eyes and he passed a trembling hand across his brow.

We joined the circle of men who stood silently regarding the black building sites. That was all that remained. The sites. A line of inch-high charcoal along the ground in rectangles to indicate where the buildings had been.

And inside—nothing identifiable as a charred body. Annihilated in the blinking of an eye. Destruction appalling in its swiftness.

There was a low curse from one man; taken up by others until it became an intense rumble of continuous curses. Then, from up on the hill, the women, huddled together, broke into mournful song:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me—

The cursing died. The men turned and walked slowly toward the women.

At that moment a sound cut the silence. The chilling scream of a Martian off in the woods; a Martian who was tasting six inches of Hot Ear's steel in his throat. Came another gurgling yell of agony and then all was silent again.

Josh took me by the sleeve and drew me aside. "Come on up the woods a piece. I want to talk."

"Certainly, Josh."

HE WALKED with head bowed like an old man. We went through the underbrush into a heavy thicket and Josh dropped wearily down on a boulder. I sat beside him.

"They want me to be their leader, younker. They want me to give the orders. We was going to take a vote on it today."

"We couldn't make a smarter move. I'm glad."

He shook his head. "I can't be no leader. My heart's too heavy. It's all beat out of me—all beat out."

"I don't understand, Josh."

"There's something's got to be done. I ought to do it but I ain't man enough. And I ain't man enough to get anybody else to do it—to tell them. That's why I'm asking you."

He was talking around something—trying to come to the point. I waited.

"This is war, Dale. War to the knife, and it's got to be fought like a war."

It occurred to me that it was the first time he'd called me by my name. "I think they found out today what they're up against."

"That's right. They'll come in now. They'll hunt us out. Maybe they'll even burn down the woods. I don't think so, though. I just know they'll come."

"And we'll keep on fighting."

"But this is war, and in war you kill traitors. They got to be shot down like dogs."

"I don't understand."

"Remember the first night you came? I sent Lee back for the gun that Martian was carrying. The one you wanted."

"I remember."

"After you left, I got a mite worried

something could happen to Lee. My younker and aii—I was nervous. So I struck out after him. Instead of going the safe roundabout way, he hit for the cement road and I followed, not calling him—just wondering.”

“He didn’t go for the gun?”

“No. He went down to the road and when one of them funny little Martian autos came along, he waved it down. He talked to them awhile and there must have been one of them that knew American ’cause he got into the car and rode away with them.”

“Maybe they captured him.”

Josh shook his head sadly. “No. All the outlanders in creation couldn’t catch Lee less he wanted to be. He went with them of his own free will.”

“I can’t understand it—it seems incredible.”

“Me too. I came back to the cabin, fretting over it. In the morning Lee showed up. He said the Martian’s body was gone.”

JOSH PUT his face into his gnarled hands. “I couldn’t bring myself to question him on it, so that’s where I become a traitor myself.”

“Stop talking that way.”

“I could have saved them—all of them—if I’d done what any soldier should do.”

“You mean Lee showed the Martians how to get to Black Pond?”

“Of course he did. They’d never of made it themselves even if they’d tried. They’d be wandering around in the woods yet. Not only that, but our sentries would have warned us. Only a mountain man could have sashayed around and killed them sentries. Only a good mountain man. Only my younker, Lee.”

I was stunned. I wanted to say something to comfort this suffering mountain man. I could find no words.

He raised his head. “Do you figure

you owe me anything for snagging you out of that prison camp?”

“I probably owe you my life.”

“Okay—I want a favor.”

“Anything,” I said, even then feeling sure what it would be.

“I want you to kill Lee.” He raised a hand. “Wait—that ain’t the word. Not kill. I want you should execute him after sentence is passed.”

“Who’ll pass sentence?”

“Reckon I’ll have to do that.”

I sat thinking for a moment. I could kill Martians with joy in my heart, but this—it meant cold-bloodedly drawing a bead on a man and putting a bullet through him. Then I again became conscious of Josh’s suffering.

“I’ll do it.”

“Thanks, Dale.”

“But where will we find him?”

“Now that the Martians got licked, I think he’ll be coming back shortly.” Josh got wearily to his feet. “Yes, I think he’ll come striding up the draw like nothing happened.”

I had a sudden thought. “Wait—maybe the Martians executed him. Possibly, with their men slaughtered, they’ll think he led them into a trap.”

JOSH FAVORED me with a pitying glance. “You ain’t thinking very good, younker. You got the least idea Lee don’t know that? You think he’d let them get their hands on him? That’s why he’ll come back. It’s the only place he’ll be safe.”

Lee returned about noon. He strode into camp, was convincingly surprised at the desolation and explained he’d been scouting the woods all night for Martian stragglers. Proudly announced he’d gotten three.

Josh sighed and handed me Hot Ear’s 30-30. “You better have this. Keep it ’til the Indian gets back. We’re breaking camp and moving into the hills. It might get left behind.”

He took his own .22 and said, "Come on, Lee. We got to head for home. There's some womenfolk there that might need some help."

We started off into the woods. We walked in silence for a mile. Then Josh said, "Lee."

Lee turned to find Josh's rifle trained on his belly at ten feet.

"Drop your gun down, younker."

"What the hell!"

"Drop it!"

Lee opened his hand and the rifle fell to the ground.

"Get it, Dale."

I circled around and picked up the gun and brought it back to where Josh was standing.

"Sit down on the ground, Lee."

"I don't get all this!"

"You will. Sit down—quick."

Lee went down on his haunches, then slowly extended his legs. Josh regarded him in silence for a full minute. "It was the filly, wasn't it, Lee? You wanted the filly Dale brought up here and you knew I wouldn't let you take her. That's it, wasn't it."

"What in hell you talking about?"

"I followed you. You got in that car. You went down and made a deal to bring them devils up here if you could have the filly. Ain't I right?"

Lee stared dully. "You followed me?" There was unbelief in his voice. Josh chuckled dryly and without humor.

"That hits your pride, don't it? You didn't figure there was a man living could trail you and get away with it. Hits your pride."

I'D EXPECTED heated denial, but there was none. Possibly this youth knew his father too well. Maybe there had been other things between them before; things to make a denial futile. He stared at Josh through calculating eyes.

"What you going to do?"

"Them devils killed women and children—burned them down to cinders."

"What you going to do?"

"I'm sentencing you to death. You got to be killed, Lee. This is war. You got to die."

Lee's lip twisted. "You can't kill me. You can't pull the trigger."

"Maybe not. I got me an executioner. Dale's going to do it."

I trained the 30-30 on Lee. Josh said, "Get up. Stand with your back to that tree. There's got to be some dignity to this."

Lee's eyes were on my gun. For the first time, he was showing fear. But he said nothing. He got up slowly, carefully, as though he expected a blast at any moment. He backed toward the tree, half crouched. An animal at bay. The rifle was at my shoulder.

Josh closed his eyes. "Now," he whispered.

The big gun thundered. It was only twenty feet. A blind man could have killed Lee at twenty feet with a 30-30. But I was not a blind man. I missed.

Lee whirled in a half turn. The closest cover was forty feet away at the edge of the open glade. He moved like a deer.

Josh brought up the .22, his face contorted. His voice came thick, strangled: "I can't—I can't—I can't!" Then: "Run, Lee. Run for your life! Run and don't never come back!"

Josh turned his face toward mine. There was gratitude in his eyes; unspoken thanks for my poor shot.

In the underbrush—a scream. A single high scream. Then silence. The still passage of a minute before Hot Ear materialized like a shadow from the underbrush. He had just finished wiping his knife. He was dropping a wad of stained grass to the ground.

"By damn! Nothing to say, old friend—nothing at all to say."

Josh's face was bleak with sadness but he didn't look quite so old now. It was as though he'd regained a certain dignity.

"You...knew?"

"Nothing to say, old friend. We got to get into the hills. Plenty hot from now on. Them devils coming back. Did you bring the gin jug?"

I LEARNED THAT IN THE DEAD EMBERS OF DEFEAT THERE OFTEN LIES THE FIRE OF VICTORY: The mountaineers re-assembled higher up on Stormy Mountain, at a spot where a natural rock formation in front of a large cave afforded protection. Also, the foreground was bare of trees—an open arena in which a great many enemies could be cut down.

They all came this time, Peggy carrying the new-born babe she'd helped bring into the world in Josh's cabin. Hot Ear strode by my side. At the cave mouth he caught my arm and drew my attention downward, pointing to a faint indentation in the soil close by a boulder.

"Two hundred years old, that track," he said. "By damn—man who made that handed in his checks way back before revolution."

Josh had said little on the trip up. "It's an Indian print. This was where the Senecas got their soap. Years ago all this stone was soft. It's hardened some since."

They got all the women into the cave along with the children. The men squatted around outside talking in low tones.

"It'll be a last stand," Josh said quietly. We'll give 'em hell, but they're too many for us. The patrols have been coming in deeper and deeper. They're making it some kind of an

issue that they get us."

"We been killing too many," Hot Ear said contentedly. He patted his 30-30 and grinned. "Betsy'll kill more before she's fried down to a piece of charcoal. By damn!"

It was mid-morning and beans were served out all round in cans. The men chomped their rations in silence while keeping one eye out for the scouts who would appear at the forest fringe to tell us the Martians were coming.

Off to the left, a shot was heard—another and another, while the men got to their feet, threw bean cans out into the open area and moved into positions behind the rocks.

I was between Josh and Hot Ear. The iron-faced Tarp was on the far side of his father rolling a wad of tobacco around in his mouth and checking the hammer of his rifle.

It occurred to me, sharply, as I watched these mountain men, that this was only a small skirmish in the vast invasion of the Martians; an inconsequential detail of the war which would probably not even go into the history books. Yet here was fiber, courage—American character at its finest. Men who would die but never yield. I felt a sudden warmth, a pride at being with them. They weren't my kind, but I hoped I could prove worthy of being their kind.

THREE FIGURES broke from the underbrush and came running across the clearing. They leaped behind the rocks and found places in the line. Only one of them spoke. Three laconic words: "Maybe five minutes."

Nobody asked any questions.

The Martians broke from cover about three and a half minutes later. Hot Ear got in the first shot. He said, "By damn!" and sent a Martian pitching forward on his face.

The Martian fire guns would not reach across the open arena. They fell

about fifty yards short. That gave the entrapped sharpshooters a distance of about twenty yards in which to be effective. The twenty yards represented the range of their own weapons over those of the invaders.

Rifles began to crack. The Martians began to fall. But it was impossible to kill them all now. They were a gray horde; a vast bank of obscenity moving forward like ocean waves. We could only cut down the forward wave and watch the next and the next move over it.

The deadly fire did check the head-on drive. The advance guard was not too anxious to step into the withering fire, but they were pushed on by those in the rear.

Josh was cutting down his men carefully, methodically, with never a miss. One bullet—one Martian. Two bullets—two Martians—and so on. Multiplying Josh by the rest of our force made a lot of dead gray men, but there were always more. They came within fire-gun range and the first hot ray melted the rock ten feet ahead of us.

Yet, there was no panic in our line. Still the even methodical firing from end to end.

But something happened to the Martians; something sudden and unexplainable. It was as though they were animals suddenly assailed by a terrorizing scent. They began milling in panic.

Then we saw their rearward ranks going down; going down silently for no apparent reason; falling in their tracks to trap those in front with a growing heap of dead bodies.

The Martians began screaming—babbling in their alien language. They became two retreating streams now, pouring left and right. But it was to no avail. At both ends of the open arena they slammed into an invisible

wall and crumpled down in death.

We had stopped firing; we stared in consternation and we saw them all die as though an invisible magnetic field had enveloped them and pushed the life from their bodies.

WHILE a few were still milling about like crazed cattle, a group of beings broke cover across the arena and came forward over the bodies of the dead Martians. They were beings such as I had never seen before.

Rather short, but they walked smartly and with brisk dignity; half a dozen warriors clad in bright red and green uniforms.

"Hold your fire," Josh breathed. It seemed only a whisper, yet it was heard clear up and down the line.

At that moment a smile appeared on the swarthy face of the leader of the strange men. He held up his hand in a peace gesture and came nimbly forward over the sprawled bodies—up to the rock barricade where he stopped—still smiling.

"Who is in charge here, please?"

He spoke meticulously, making it obvious that he was unsure of the language and didn't want to make any mistakes. I pushed Josh to his feet. The green and red warrior came forward and held out his hand. Josh took it, shook it, dropped it.

"Allow me to introduce myself and apologize. INTRODUCTION: I am Zav Dorn Ledet of the Planetary Venusian Armies. APOLOGY: We are very sorry to have had to land on your planet without proper announcements and ceremonies but we could not allow the Martian—scum I think your word is—to destroy you."

No one said anything. No one could think of anything to say. Zav Dorn Ledet went on: "They are poor fighters, very timid in defeat. We were surprised that they invaded you be-

cause we had told them not to. It was in our over-all plan to wait fifty more years until you were a trifle further advanced and then contact you with the idea of opening mutual relationships."

He smiled a sunny smile. "We will be very careful about destruction on your planet while removing this vermin and will enter into negotiations to pay any damages incurred. Incidentally, we have made five landings and the situation is controlled, very

controlled.

He hesitated. "Doesn't anyone wish to say anything? I repeat, our feelings are of the friendliest. We do not wish to offend you. Later if you do not wish to enter into mutually beneficial relationships, we will return as we came. Doesn't someone wish to say something? I understand your language most readily."

Hot Ear pulled a stick of tobacco from his pocket. "By damn!" he said. "We sure do! Have a chew!"



THE RECENT international congress on interplanetary flight held in London this year was enough to gladden the heart of any lover of science fiction and any believer in the ultimate possibility of space flight. Here, experts from every country (except the Soviet Union) met and discussed the technological problems confronting Man in his quest to get off the Earth and, oddly enough, it appears that the greatest drawback to advanced rocket flight is not technological matters, but that old bugaboo—money!

Wernher von Braun, former head of Peenemuende, where the V-2 was developed during the war, and now director of a United States rocket research station, was about the only outstanding individual who did not attend the convention. But the American representative read a paper of his in which, in exact detail, von Braun calls for a rocket flight to Mars! In some respects this paper was the highlight of the convention for, down to the last trivial item, it discusses the means and methods and plans of a supposed flight to Mars of some seventy technicians—a rocket venture on the grand scale!

Von Braun envisions first the construction and installation of an Earth satellite rocket, for use as a base for the Martian flight. Then he postulates a similar base placed around Mars after a two-hundred-and-sixty-day flight. He visualizes a fleet of shuttle rockets supplying this satellite and then the landing of an expedition on Mars from the satellite. The plan is huge and grandiose in conception and, as impressive as it is, we can't help feeling that the cause of rocketry would have been better served had von Braun stuck to the

simpler and more immediately conceivable idea of getting an Earth satellite built, or taking the basic journey to the Moon.

Nevertheless, all these matters were considered at the conference, and hopes ran high. An international organization was formed to coordinate space-flight research. Its president is Dr. Eugen Saenger, famous as one of the early authorities on rockets, and now known for his work with wartime German rocket planes.

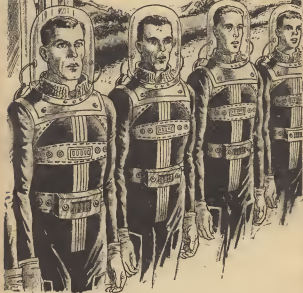
The convention and its success suggested that something is definitely in the wind. This affair, along with the numerous public announcements in rocketry and the publication of numerous papers and pamphlets, leads one to believe that there is a stirring even in official circles, an awakening which can only lead to rocket flights—in interplanetary—in the not-too-remote future!

When rocket authorities and enthusiasts were few in number, it seemed as though the day of the Lunar rocket were far off, indeed, but now, when prominent, technologically responsible men are advocating space flight, there is no question that something will be done about it. Noticeably, von Braun, even in his most enthusiastic moments, has the habit of calling the attention of the government to the fact that whoever first builds the artificial satellite around the Earth literally "controls" the world, in the sense that from it an atomic bomb can be planted everywhere. He does not do this for the purpose of war-mongering, but rather to show that democracy must act on this matter if it wants to survive. You may be sure that the Reds have given the matter a lot of thought—and let's hope that *thought* is all they've given to it!

THROWBACK

By H. B. Hickey

When Earth's irresistible weapon was of no use against the Lubians, Peter Quirt went back to first principles!



While the rest of the crew minded their manners, Peter fought the battle of his life



BY ONE o'clock in the morning Ensign Peter Quirt, Space Fleet, Sirius Base, was ready to commit murder. The dress uniform he had intended to wear to the Captain's dance was rumpled, his short-cropped red hair stood on end and his yard-wide shoulders had developed a sag.

At eight o'clock the radiation alarm in the battle cruiser had gone off.

Despite the fact that Quirt was about to enter a tumblebug, Lieutenant Frame had ordered him to take a crew and check the alarm and arrange for the leak to be repaired.

"It'll only take a few minutes," Frame had said. "I'll explain to Betty. You can have one of my later dances with her and I'll take the first one."

Except that it hadn't taken a few

minutes. Five hours later the dance was well over. And all the bells in the alarm system were still ringing, still drilling their way through Quirt's ear plugs and clanging their way into Quirt's brain.

He was standing on a runway, a system blueprint in his hand and mayhem in his eyes, when he became aware of someone behind him. He turned. It was Senior Lieutenant Dale, night C. O.

Dale opened his mouth to speak and realized Quirt could never hear him. Snapping his mouth shut, the C. O. motioned Quirt to follow him outside. Once they were beyond the hatch, silence closed in like the cool waters of a desert lake. Quirt sighed and pulled the ear plugs.

"What seems to be wrong?" Dale demanded.

Quirt grunted. "Not a thing. Not a leak anywhere. Of course, I had a hunch—"

"I am not interested in hunches," Dale snapped. "If the radiation alarm goes on there must be a leak somewhere. The system is arranged to—"

"—pinpoint a leak," Quirt interrupted. "But only if one bell rings. When they're *all* ringing at once..." He shrugged.

Senior Lieutenant Dale eyed him coldly and Quirt's heart sank. Dale could break him. And he had a hunch that Dale and the other higher-rank-ing officers bore him no love.

In a service that ran to cool, slim mathematics majors from the Fleet academy, Pete Quirt was the bull-necked, football-major intruder from an engineering school.

There had been indications that certain officers felt a wrong type of person had been allowed to enter the Service. And on Quirt's part there had been a growing feeling that he

had picked the wrong service.

THE SPACE FLEET! It had represented everything that was adventurous and dramatic in a boy's life—risk, danger, the call of distant places. But The Space Fleet was no longer what it had been when Quirt was twelve years old.

The far places were dots on perfect charts. You pushed a button and an automatic pilot lifted your ship, drove it across the galaxy and landed it without a jar. Even the risk was gone. Every maneuver, every twist and turn was decided by the rigorous application of the *minimax* theory, brought to its fullest development by Admiral Cantwell in the Battle of Bemiji, at which time Earth had defeated the numerically superior fleet of Jupiter for control of the galaxy.

That battle had been fought thirty years before, and Cantwell was long dead. But Cantwell's picture hung in every control room and the Space Fleet was the living enshrinement of the maximum probability approach and the *minimax* theory of smallest risk for greatest gain.

Altogether, the Fleet was no place for a young man whose emotional temperature equalled his body heat. Except for a certain blonde and buxom young lady named Betty, whose father commanded this base, Pete Quirt would long since have turned-in his resignation.

At the moment Quirt was trying desperately to maintain an even keel. "Believe me, sir," he said, "we have covered the entire alarm system."

"Proceeding by leaps and hunches, no doubt," Lieutenant Dale snorted.

"But when there's no way of telling..."

"There is still a method—the Fleet method. You proceed from most probable to least probable. In five hours

that should produce results."

Dale was talking down, as to a child. "If you have checked the alarm system already, then the next probability will be the radiation screens. Proceed to those."

Quirt shook his head doggedly. "I've got a hunch the trouble's somewhere in the inner-wall pipelines."

"Mr. Quirt," Dale said nastily, bringing Quirt to stiff attention. "Had you familiarized yourself with your handbook, you would know that in this case the pipelines would offer minimum probability."

"Yes, sir," Quirt said.

"You will proceed to the radiation screens."

"Yes, sir," Quirt said.

Dale spun on his heel and marched off.

Quirt found himself trembling with anger. For a long moment he considered calling Lieutenant Dale back and punching his nose. He was fed to the gills with Dale, the Fleet and probability. It was only the thought of Betty that saved Dale's nose. Instead, Quirt lit a cigarette and puffed at it savagely.

He was leaning against the hatch cover a few minutes later, savoring a last puff, when a tumblebug stopped alongside and three of his fellow ensigns hopped out.

"Well, well," said Ensign Taft. "Still here, eh?" He grinned slyly.

"Yeah," Quirt muttered.

"Bells still ringing?" queried Ensign Bathazar.

"Yeah."

"It was a fine dance," grinned Ensign Yellen. "Miss Weatherell was a vision."

"Mmmmm," hummed Taft. His hands described suggestive arcs. "Lieutenant Frame thought so, too. He wouldn't let anyone else get near her."

There was a pause while they considered Quirt. He was ordinarily good-natured; there were three of them to one of him; a fight would get Quirt in hot water.

Not knowing about Lieutenant Dale's recent visit, they decided they probably had plenty of leeway.

"Cheek to cheek all evening," Bathazar grinned. "I believe Frame's got her out now, seeing how the stars look away from the lights of the base."

They all laughed.

A light flared in Peter Quirt's eyes. He flipped the cigarette away and watched it arc to the ground. He pushed his shoulders away from the hatch cover.

"Let's *all* have fun," he said. And went in swinging.

IT WAS a very small pin that lay in Ensign Quirt's palm an hour later. It was just small enough and just large enough; small enough to have been sucked through most of the pipes, and just large enough to have jammed a main petcock.

Quirt's handbook said that swearing was an unsemantic and infantile method of obtaining emotional release. For the third time that night Peter Quirt disregarded the handbook.

"If I may say so, sir," Yeoman Melnick said, "a thing like that couldn't get in by accident."

"You're damn right it couldn't," Quirt told him.

"But that would mean someone had done it deliberately, sir."

"You couldn't be more right."

"But that doesn't make sense, sir."

It seemed to Quirt he could still hear those bells. He regarded the yeoman with a mocking smile.

"You mean that has the lowest order of probability, Mr. Melnick? You mean that according to minimax and

maximin and all the mathematical formulae of probability no member of this fleet would do such a thing?"

He smiled sweetly and grimly. "Well, you couldn't be wronger. There are two good reasons why one of our officers and gentlemen should play me five hours of chimes this evening."

Anger was making the cords stand out on Quirt's neck. He held up two large and ominous fists. "Well, I'm going to show him two better reasons why he shouldn't have done it!"

With a final string of lurid oaths Quirt dismissed the men. Then he swung about and headed for the hatch. Lieutenant Frame had called the tune, now he was going to pay the piper.

It was just at that moment that Lieutenant Frame swung open the hatch and stepped through into the ship.

"Deliver my enemies unto my hands!" Quirt chortled in disbelief. "If it isn't Lieutenant Bellringer."

"Attention!" Frame snapped. He was tall, trim, except for a small scratch which looked like it might have been dug into his wrist by a young lady's fingernail. Quirt noticed the scratch immediately.

"What's going on here?" Frame demanded. But his eyes gave him away.

From beyond him another voice asked the same question: "What's going on here?"

It was the second voice that halted Quirt's fist in midair. Beyond Frame appeared Captain Weatherell. On one side of the captain was his daughter. On the other side was Admiral Kingsley, visiting the base on an inspection tour, in whose honor the dance had been given.

And behind the admiral was Senior Lieutenant Dale.

Pete Quirt groaned. He had a good idea of how he looked. One of his

epaulets was missing. His coat was torn at the right armpit. Alongside his left eye a bruise lent a touch of darker color to his features, thanks to a lucky punch by Ensign Taft.

"Ensign Quirt reporting, sir. The difficulty with the radiation alarm system has been uncovered and corrected."

Betty was regarding him with anger blazing from her eyes, although Quirt thought he also detected some compassion. In her father's expression the compassion was absent.

Nodding to Admiral Kingsley, Captain Weatherell murmured, "I'm sure you realize how unrepresentative this man is."

To Quirt: "You are a disgrace to the Space Fleet. I'll see you in my office first thing in the morning."

Quirt stifled a sigh of relief. It could have been worse. At least he would live until morning.

But he had reckoned without Lieutenant Dale.

"Excuse me, sir," Dale said to Weatherell. "I'd like to ask Ensign Quirt a question." He narrowed an eye at Quirt. "Exactly what was wrong with the radiation alarm?"

"A pin jamming a main petcock, sir."

"I see. In the inner wall system?"

"Yes, sir."

"After you had checked the screens?"

"No, sir." Quirt hated to say it but he refused to lie.

"Then you deliberately disobeyed my orders?"

The color was running back into Quirt's face. "But the point is I found the trouble! It would have taken hours to—"

"You deliberately played a hunch, taking the line of minimum probability."

It was the worst thing Lieutenant

Dale could have said about any man. He could not have sounded more scornful had Quirt been found guilty of robbing a blind man.

And Quirt, casting about for a sign of encouragement from the others, found none. Weatherell was stony-faced. And Admiral Kingsley, white haired and ramrod stiff, was staring at a spot directly over Quirt's head. There might have been something in the Admiral's eye, but what it was Quirt couldn't tell.

Probably, considering that he was one of the few left who had served with Cantwell, the admiral was wondering whether thirty years in jail would be sufficient punishment.

But it was Captain Weatherell who was running this show. "On second thought, I'll see you in my office in half an hour."

"Yes, sir," Quirt said.

APPROACHING a terrible but just punishment, a man should feel frightened, yet humble and resigned. But Ensign Peter Quirt felt none of those things.

He had washed, slicked his hair and donned a fresh uniform. He had lightly powdered the bruise on his cheek. He looked presentable.

But there was no humility in him. Only anger. And his shoulders swung belligerently as he headed around the administration building a half hour later.

Turning the corner he slammed into a softly rounded figure. "Betty!" He grabbed her, held her upright.

"Pete."

They regarded each other in the gloom.

"What's the verdict going to be?" he asked. "The gas chamber? Exile? Put me in a space suit and make me walk the plank?"

"Stop it!" Betty said sharply. "If you cared anything about me you'd

act more like—like—" She groped for the word.

"Like a human slide rule," Pete supplied. "Like Lieutenant Frame."

"All right, like Lieutenant Frame. Like an officer of the Fleet. He would at least have sent me a message telling me why he hadn't shown up at the dance!"

"He—?" Quirt was open-mouthed. Insult was being added to injury.

But he was too angry to reply. Instead, he blurted, "Betty, listen. I'm crazy about you. You believe that, don't you?"

"I will, when you start acting human instead of like a wild animal. Until then, I'll stick to more rational escorts."

She was gone.

For a moment he considered going after her. But what was the use? It was all over with her. In a few minutes it would be all over with everything.

Might as well quit stalling and go in and face the music, Quirt thought. He straightened up, squared his big shoulders and went on in.

FOR THE first few minutes he got the silent treatment. Captain Weatherell steepled long fingers and glowered at the ensign from behind his massive desk. Alongside the captain, Admiral Kingsley nibbled reflectively at a loose lower lip.

At long last the captain sighed. "I don't know," he said. "I do not understand it."

Quirt said nothing. The captain shuffled a few papers and transferred his mordant gaze to them.

"How you ever passed your primary screening is beyond me," he grunted. He looked up slowly but his next words came rapid fire: "Why did you join this service?"

Quirt was caught off guard. He answered without thinking, "I like to

fight."

"Ah," the captain murmured, and shot a knowing glance at Admiral Kingsley. "Try as we will, sir, it was inevitable that one should slip by us."

Quirt might as well not have been in the room as Weatherell went on, talking more *at* the admiral than *to* him: "Definitely a thalamic type, sir. His hypno-analysis shows it. I can see what happened, though. With a conscious, cortical rating of 9.4, his subconscious, thalamic reactions to tests were regarded as problem reactions, rather than most primitive challenge reactions."

The admiral seemed puzzled. "I'm afraid I've been so occupied with tactical calculators, I've fallen behind on this psycho-evaluation stuff. Cut off a man's conscious, thinking mind and he'd naturally revert, wouldn't he?"

"We've discovered different degrees of reversion in various individuals, sir. Actually, I don't think we could find another junior officer in the Fleet who could show much thalamic reaction at all."

Although Weatherell had made his reputation in Personnel and his next statement might have reflected some glory on himself, he made it without show of pride. "The Fleet today boasts the finest thinking men Earth has produced." He nodded at Admiral Cantwell's picture. "He would be proud of them, sir."

Thinking men. Without taint of thalamic, emotional response. There was a bitter taste in Pete Quirt's mouth.

Lieutenant Frame probably hadn't a trace of real ardor where Betty was concerned. She was the captain's daughter; the logical, thinking man, desirous of advancement, should logically make a pair for her.

So it wasn't a matter of liking or disliking a certain ensign, as far as

Frame was concerned. The ensign was in the way. He most logically had to be put out of the way. That was the way Frame's mind would run.

Quirt put on the mental brakes as he realized Captain Weatherell was speaking to him again.

"So you realize, Ensign Quirt, that this affair of yours with my daughter has nothing to do with my decision concerning you."

Quirt stiffened. "Our affair, as you call it, sir, has terminated."

"So? Then I'm glad the impassioned plea in your behalf which she made only a few moments ago failed to move me."

He smiled a tight, wintry smile. "I do what I am about to do impersonally, of course. Also with understanding that your thalamus is beyond your control. Nevertheless..."

He paused. "...Nevertheless, you are a disgrace to this Service! For that alone a dishonorable discharge might suffice. But more than that, sir, you are an atavism!"

His last word might have been profanity, so bitter had his tone become. "An atavism! A throwback! Your reasoning ability insures that you knew what you were doing. You tried to use this Fleet as an outlet for man's most primitive instincts!" Weatherell was almost shouting. "In utter disregard, sir, of the harm you might do the Fleet!" He took a deep breath and lowered his voice. "I hope the penalty I am about to inflict upon you may deter others like you in the future. That is the reason for its severity."

Quirt's mind reeled. It was going to be worse than he'd dreamed possible. He was a threat to a giant edifice of logic, and his punishment would come as an avalanche of logical necessity. Merciless.

He was only dimly aware that Weatherell was no longer looking at

him. The captain had flipped up the switch on his desk visiphone and was speaking rapidly: "Yes? Come in, Control." A pause. "Yes, I understood, Fleet Freighter *Jubilee* has gone out of contact."

The visiphone buzzed and Weatherell listened. Then: "How do you mean, lost? You can get a radar fix on them, can't you?"

More buzzing. "All right then. Give me the crash probability. They couldn't have simply vanished."

A pause. Weatherell came half way out of his chair. "The devil you say! Order out a cruiser for search. Full complement."

FOR THE while Captain Weatherell had forgotten both Quirt and Admiral Kingsley. He muttered to himself as he drummed the desk.

"What's up, Weatherell?" the admiral asked finally.

"Eh?" Weatherell came to, startled. "Sorry, sir. Rather an odd thing. Freighter *Jubilee*, out of Sagittarius, seems to have lost contact with us. Both communication and direction beams apparently out. And although they're within radar range, none of our stations can find them."

He shook his head. "Odd thing. No mass in the vicinity of their last fix that might account for a crash."

"How about a forced landing somewhere?" the white-haired Kingsley asked.

Weatherell grunted worriedly. He flipped a switch on his desk top. At the far end of the room a three-dimensional projection appeared, an expanded model of the Sirius area and the beams which led into it from other star systems.

The captain got out a pointer and poked it into the projection. "This is Sirius Base. Here's the beam *Jubilee* was on, last reported position. Only large mass nearby is Lubi, planet,

type 4Y, and that's hardly a possibility if we consider the direction and speed of the *Jubilee*.

"No," he went on, "our best choice is a search of the area with a ship equipped for short-range, high-power radar."

"Hmmm," Admiral Kingsley hummed. "Lost. That's not supposed to happen. You said this planet, Lubi, was 4Y?"

"Yes, sir," Weatherell said.

He knew what was in Kingsley's mind. For that matter, so did Ensign Quirt. Barring accident, the highest probability was attack by some enemy.

But while the numeral in Lubi's planet type denoted habitation by an intelligent race, the letter denoted a most backward technology. Hardly a springboard for attack on the galaxy's greatest power.

The visiphone clamored again for Weatherell's attention. He flicked it to life.

"Yes? What do you mean we can't man a cruiser?" There was a pause while the captain's face grew fiery. "I know you can't locate Quirt. He's right here in my office. What about the other three?" Another pause. "All three?" The captain's face grew hard. "All right," he snapped. "I'll attend to it. Get the ship ready for blastoff."

It was apparent that Weatherell was trying hard to keep himself under control as he flipped off the visiphone and turned back to Quirt. A full minute passed while he munched his lips.

It was Admiral Kingsley who had to break the long silence. "More trouble?" the white-haired man murmured.

Weatherell grunted. "Yes. Our only vessel equipped for search is a cruiser. And we do not at present have the mandatory minimum of two junior officers with which to man the ship."

"But I thought at the dance I saw—"

"Yes, sir. We actually have five ensigns assigned here. One is already aboard ship. Three others, I now learn, are in hospital, badly beaten and under sedative."

The captain's color was going to run into the ultraviolet if it kept rising. He impaled Quirt with his glare. "Put there by you!"

Admiral Kingsley showed a stir of interest. "All three?"

And Quirt wondered: did the veiled eyes and lifted white brows denote amused respect?

"All three," Weatherell snapped. "I shall recommend to them that they file charges."

More grief. But Quirt was beyond caring. What could they do, boil him in oil?

"A dilemma," the admiral murmured.

"Hardly, sir. Ensign Quirt will go with the ship. But under arrest and with no authority except in his ordinary duties, and to return the ship to base in case the other officers should be disabled. It shall be so understood by the other officers and crew."

The captain jerked his head at Quirt. "Report to ship."

LIEUTENANT FRAME had the controls. Ensign Gaynor had charge of the radar equipment. Ensign Pete Quirt manned the computer. His companions' manner put him as much in solitary confinement as if he'd been behind bars.

There was little for Quirt to do but think bitter thoughts. Behind, at the base, a much larger and more complex computer had been fed all available data and was now grinding out the search pattern which offered the optimum chance of success.

When the basic search pattern had been computed, it would be transferred to Quirt. His job would then be to

feed the general formula to his own computer to be broken down into small-area search patterns.

For Quirt the job was a lonely one. Except for an occasional check to make certain all circuits were operating, he would have nothing more to do for a while. Then he'd feed the computer its formulae. And finally he'd have to translate his own computer's formulae into chart language.

It had been a rough night. Quirt was half dreaming and Gaynor's voice startled him.

"Base coming through," Gaynor said suddenly.

"Stand by to receive," Frame snapped.

Quirt was now fully awake. He lifted a pair of scissors and let the receiving tape run through it until a change in formulae type was indicated. Then he cut the tape and led it into his computer. The next set of formulae went into a second bank of cells.

On practise runs he had often been amazed at the procedure. The machines were computing problems which would have taken hundreds of men a lifetime.

More than that. The possibility of foul play was almost zero. The possibility of a freighter's getting lost was also almost zero. Yet out of these zeros the machines were setting up a table of probabilities which had value. Whatever search patterns were evolved would have the greatest chance of finding the freighter.

And more even than that. Even if the freighter's disappearance had been caused deliberately; even if the one who had caused it should try to do the unexpected, should go off on a wild tack; even against such random chances, the machines would grind out rational patterns of search.

I should have known, Quirt told himself. Men who live by such machines are bound to turn into rational ma-

chines themselves.

The Space Fleet, Quirt thought. They should have called it the Computer Fleet. Or, toying with words, the Push-Button Fleet.

Aloud he said, "Here it comes."

"Chart it," Frame told him. Not gruff, not angry. Just impersonal.

"Right, Lieutenant."

THE TAPE was on the chart and Quirt arced on the lines of search and numbered them. They made a queer sort of rambling design. Not an orderly pattern, yet definitely a pattern.

The search would go in big sweeps, aimlessly it seemed, and yet Quirt noted that the sweeps would shift to and fro around the planet Lubi. Yet the cruiser would not actually approach Lubi too closely.

He snorted to himself. It was logical, but in a senseless sort of way. Because it was the only large body in this immensity of space, Lubi was the logical choice. But because everything was assigned an order of probability, Lubi's greater probability was balanced by a large number of smaller probabilities.

It was not being ignored, just slightly bypassed.

Quirt snorted again. "I'd bet my shirt it's on Lubi," he muttered.

"Did you say something?" Frame asked.

"Just a hunch I had."

"Keep it to yourself."

It was an order, and ordinarily Quirt might have obeyed it. But how much worse off could he be?

"It's on Lubi," he said defiantly.

Lieutenant Frame reached for the chart. "That what the chart says?"

"No. I got it out of my thalamus, not from *minimax*."

After that Quirt lapsed into silence. Lieutenant Frame set the controls for the first sweep and Ensign Gaynor be-

gan to comb the emptiness with his radar beams.

The cruiser lanced through a hundred thousand miles of space and started its second arc for another hundred thousand miles. And when that was done they went through another hundred thousand.

Then Base called and Captain Weatherell's voice came into the control room.

"Nothing yet, sir," Frame reported.

"Very well. Continue. Anything else?" Meaning Quirt.

"Nothing, sir. All quiet." Also meaning Quirt.

That was it. Weatherell's voice was gone and the cruiser went into the fourth sweep. And off the port side there was a growing blob of light that was Lubi.

"It's on Lubi," Quirt said. He said it loudly.

And then, strangely, he was suddenly not at all certain. In fact, he would have bet the same shirt that the freighter *Jubilee* was *not* on Lubi.

Now the planet was dead ahead and looming larger in the view screen. And the closer it got the more uncertain Quirt became.

"Say!" That was Ensign Gaynor.

Frame looked up from his chart. "What?"

"I thought I had something," Gaynor shook his head. He was a tall, doleful fellow, and when he shook his head he reminded Quirt of a bloodhound.

"Seemed the right shape. But now it's gone."

"Cloud mass," Frame suggested. He had, Quirt noted, developed a preoccupied, almost worried air.

"Hardly a cloud mass," Gaynor said.

"Well, keep checking," Frame said heavily. He snapped on the ship intercom and checked with the crew. Quirt wondered what he could be so con-

cerned about.

"Say!" Gaynor blurted suddenly.

"Again?" Frame demanded.

The lieutenant shook his head slightly as though to clear it. And Quirt noticed that Gaynor too was shaking his head.

As for himself, he too felt a moment of indecision and concern. The planet Lubi now filled the view screen. There had been the feeling of dread, the certainty and desire that the *Jubilee* not be on Lubi. Then the indecision.

And now both were gone. Now Quirt was pretty sure again that the *Jubilee* was down there. Everything was all right.

He looked at Frame and Frame said, "Looks like a good chance it's down there. I'll notify Base that we're going in to check."

Frame had lost his worried look. His features wore the untroubled calm of a little child. So did Gaynor's.

Everything was going to be all right.

On the back of Quirt's neck the short hairs stood erect. Something gnawed at the pit of his stomach. Yet he too felt fine, felt as though everything were going to be perfectly taken care of.

THEY CAME into the landing on a long graceful sweep, and it seemed to Quirt much like Earth, except that Lubi was a planet of muted colors, pink and faint amber and the foliage all in palest greens. No great oceans, but large areas of rosy sand that gave the planet its characteristic color.

There were twenty-seven men in the cruiser's crew and all of them had come into the control room and were standing there waiting. As though it were the natural thing to do. Which it wasn't.

The strange thing was that neither Frame nor Gaynor nor Quirt said a

word. They had watched the men come in, accepting them, knowing that right now this was where everyone belonged.

And when the cruiser had come to rest and they saw that the *Jubilee* lay right alongside, that seemed perfectly normal too. As though they had all known that it would be right there.

On Lubi there were no large cities. They had landed next to one of the villages of low, round buildings.

"All right," Frame said.

He went first. Then Gaynor and Quirt and then the rest of the men according to grade. They filed down out of the ship one at a time, and without being told or receiving a direct order they marched in file to where the crew and officers of the *Jubilee* were arrayed before the huge freighter.

There was a group of Lubians waiting for them, tall, gaunt, with sunken eyes and foreheads that bulged and then angled sharply back to end in tufts of silky smoke-grey hair. Their skins were mottled mauve and so oily as to appear iridescent.

"This is very good," one of the Lubians said. He looked no different from the others, except for a jewelled clasp at the throat of his gray tunic. All wore crude molecular weapons at the waist.

"Very good," the Lubian repeated. "We had not expected to catch a cruiser." He smiled, and it was not a pleasant thing to see.

"My name is Eldron and I am the..." he searched for a word, "...the leader here. Beginning with the lieutenant you will each say your names so we shall know you."

"I am Lieutenant Walter Frame," Frame said obediently.

"I am Ensign Arthur Gaynor."

"I am Ensign Peter Quirt."

They went all the way down the line like that, like a class of children

at the start of a new term with a new teacher. When they were all done Eldron nodded.

"Very good. And now, so that you will understand your places in our Plan, I shall explain everything. You will see that we bring only peace, and you will want to help."

One of the Lubians interrupted, "That is not important."

"Perhaps. But it can do no harm. The deeper will may be brought into play, and it should know that we are friends."

There were about fifty of the Lubians. They formed an arc around Eldron and pressed close up to the Earthmen. Eldron proceeded: "We had no thought of conquest until you came. You, with your classifications of our intelligence and our way of life."

His voice was bitter. "Our civilization is older than yours. Yet you choose to call it backward. Why? Because it did not flower outward, into the objective world? Because it did not produce what you would call a civilized technology?"

"Because," the old man grated, "we found ourselves sufficient unto ourselves and did not roam the galaxy imposing our unwelcome presence on other sentients?"

"Well, a race must rule or be ruled. You thought us no danger. Class 4Y, is it not? No space fleets and no atomic weapons."

The old man paused. He laughed aloud and the laughter was echoed by the other Lubians. Their eyes were bright with the same kind of brightness that might have been observed in the Middle Ages on Earth in the eyes of the leader of a Black Mass.

"But we have our own powers," Eldron said. "Our own weapons. You control atoms. We can control Man."

His voice lifted shrilly. "You will learn. You *are* learning. And here is another example."

With startling suddenness the old man swung his hand upward, his whole body turning with the swing. His hand splatted against the side of Lieutenant Frame's face.

FRAME SWAYED with the force of the blow. His face reddened along one side. But he did not move, did not strike back.

"So!" Eldron said. He studied Frame. "You felt the blow?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not return it?"

"I didn't want to."

"But your mind is clear? You see and feel and think as usual?"

"Yes."

"Think of a problem, a difficult problem, and try to solve it aloud."

Obediently, Frame began the construction of a problem in advance logistics, such as an instructor might give to a class. Then, step by step, he proceeded to work out the solution.

"Good," Eldron said. He turned to the Lubians. "The control is perfect."

It was Ensign Peter Quirt who furnished an interruption. "What control?" he asked.

Eldron laughed again and turned his attention to Quirt. "The control over your mind," he said. "You know you must think as we wish you to think, do you not?"

"Yes," Quirt said.

"Of course. Just as you control your machines, we control your minds, which are but thinking machines. Just as you have perfected the type of energy which controls and operates machines, so we have perfected the brain waves which control thoughts.

"Fortunately," Eldron smiled, "your rational minds are highly developed. Lower animals are not sensitive to the same waves."

The old man seemed to tire of his boasting. There was more urgent business pressing. "Tell us, now, what

will be our most probable difficulty?"

Lieutenant Frame gave it some thought. "At how great a distance will your control operate?"

"Only as far as the waves will travel; about the distance at which we took control of you and your ship. We cannot send the waves mechanically."

Frame shook his head. "Then from bases beyond your control, Earth will send guided missiles to destroy Lubi."

"Only if they know about us," Eldron grinned.

"They will. As soon as we return to our base. Once outside your range of control we will be free again."

Eldron nodded. "We have anticipated that. Several of us will return with you. Once we have control of your base we shall proceed to the next step."

"Which is—?"

"Earth itself!" Eldron's bony fingers slowly clenched into a fist, as though he were crushing Earth in his hand. "How many of its own ships, Lieutenant, would it take to destroy an unsuspecting Earth?"

Unable to help himself, Frame gave the question some dispassionate consideration.

"That would depend on the ships' firepower. Three battleships, I would say. Five or six cruisers."

"So, Lieutenant, do you know what cargo the *Jubilee* carries?"

Frame shook his head.

"A supply of your newest weapons. Designed to triple or quadruple a ship's firepower. I believe we should have no difficulty then?"

"None at all," Frame replied.

Eldron found that most amusing. "Excellent. And as you seem a most capable officer, I think you may have the honor of destroying your home planet."

"And now," he was suddenly very

businesslike, "we shall prepare to take off. You will report to your base that you have found the *Jubilee*, giving a reasonable explanation for its silence. Once there, we shall proceed to take over."

"Very well."

IT SEEMED to Pete Quirt that there was a cold weight at the pit of his stomach. A strange sensation. His head was clear, he felt calm. He was about to follow Frame and the others aboard ship.

He knew what they were supposed to do and that they would do it. And the Lubians' plan would succeed. There wasn't a chance it could fail.

First Sirius Base and then unsuspecting Earth. A sure thing.

And yet—the feeling persisted.

He was aware that nothing was happening. Eldron was watching him.

"Something?" the old man asked. "You see difficulties, perhaps?"

Quirt's mind ticked off the possibilities. He was forced to warn Eldron of whatever dangers he foresaw, no matter how slight.

"Yes. Your control may not operate in other areas as it does here."

"It depends upon brain waves from the highest centers," Eldron said. "Not upon outside influences. It operated on your ship as well as here on Lubi."

Quirt saw that clearly. Why there should have been any doubt was a mystery. And yet he knew that there was a flaw.

"Your control may not affect all men equally," he said.

Eldron smiled grimly. "I think it will. It exerts its power upon the thing for which you pride yourselves, your thinking minds."

That was that. Except that Eldron was examining Quirt with baleful eyes.

"Or perhaps you missed my demonstration on the Lieutenant? Very well. You shall have your own object lesson."

His evil eyes glistening with sadistic anticipation, he lifted his right hand. With all his might he struck Quirt across the face.

ALL OF Quirt's calm was gone. From deep inside him a rage exploded, obscuring his vision with a red haze. He seemed neither to hear nor see. Like a bull in the ring, stung by bandilleras to blood madness, he erupted into action.

Eldron's face crumpled into a bloody mass at Quirt's first blow. He screamed once as he fell and then Quirt stumbled over his body, raging forward to get at the other Lubians.

He caught them completely off guard. One man attacking fifty with his bare hands. It was insane. It was unbelievable. Before they could even realize this truly was happening, Quirt was among them.

His arms flailed wildly, but his fists were like sledge hammers and all around them were nothing but enemies. He smashed a bloody path into their midst.

Even then they could have stopped him easily. But he had taken them so by surprise that their next reaction was to retaliate in kind. Closing around him, they rained a deluge of blows on Quirt.

Instead of stopping him, or even slowing him, the punishment Quirt took only increased his blind fury. Each blow, each stab of pain, added a fresh jolt of adrenalin to his system. He seemed to gather fresh power.

But the weight of numbers was bound to tell. For each Lubian who fell with broken ribs or staggered back with his nose shattered, there was another to take his place. And two

others to fling themselves on Quirt's back.

There was no chance to fire a weapon. In the wild melee, a Lubian had too much greater a chance of hitting a friend than the solitary foe. But it was not too difficult to reverse a gun and swing it club-fashion.

Quirt felt no immediate pain as a weapon barrel cracked against his skull. But with the next blow a great weariness overtook him. And a numbness that strangely began in his feet rather than at the point of impact.

He still felt no great pain, only a sort of deep sorrow. He was but dimly aware that he was on his knees. He had fought like a wild bull, and now, like the ring bull, he awaited the death thrust.

It never came.

Searing heat licked at his right cheek. Blinding white light flashed about him, and there was the smell of scorching flesh.

Was this death? Hellfire?

A roaring, a shouting, a tumult. The first sounds he heard since his own pounding pulse had thundered in his ears.

"Lift him!"

"Drag him!"

Quirt pawed feebly. Hands rough on his hands, arms hard against his arms.

"The ship!"

He was being lifted, dropped, carried, dragged, flung. More lights. Blinding. So bright they could only be the cruiser's heaviest guns at point-blank range.

Lieutenant Frame's voice, not so cool, not so calm. "Blastoff. Blastoff!"

A roar so deep it could be only the roar of atomics hurling a giant ship into space.

AFTERWARD, in Captain Weatherell's office—how much later

Quirt didn't know because his head was bandaged and he was half groggy—Quirt got the rest of the story.

First, of course, there'd been a lot of excitement. A crowd at the landing. Frame had got word ahead, besides the fact that the telescopes had picked up the bursts of light on Lubi. Big excitement for a usually dull base.

But in Weatherell's office it was pretty quiet. Admiral Kingsley, Senior Lieutenant Dale, Weatherell, Frame, and Betty. And Betty shouldn't have been there, but her father couldn't keep her out after she'd seen Quirt looking like a crash victim.

In the corner of the room one machine recorded what was said and another transmitted the stuff direct to Earth. Except for an occasional quiet question from Weatherell, Frame had done most of the talking.

He still had the ball: "...it had been like a sort of clear membrane around our minds. And suddenly, sir, the membrane seemed to split. And there was this wild melee with Ensign Quirt in the center."

He paused and sighed. "I imagine it must have taken a concerted effort by some number of the Lubians to maintain their control. At this particular point enough of them must have become involved in the diversion created by Quirt to break the control."

"I see," the captain murmured. "And until this membrane, as you call it, split, you could not interfere?"

"No, sir. We saw everything clearly, but simply had no will to enter the fray."

"And then?"

"Well, the rest was automatic. They hadn't even taken our weapons, they'd been so sure of themselves. We burned them down before they knew what hit them."

Frame hesitated momentarily. "My

next impulse was to run. But I thought another control might be established before we'd got out of range. So I ordered point blank fire on the town."

"Knowing you might hit the *Jubilee*?"

"A calculated risk, sir. If the *Jubilee* touched off, it would have furnished sufficient warning for you."

"I see." Weatherell nodded, looked at Dale, who nodded too. "Very good."

Weatherell permitted himself a smile. Quirt, who was feeling somewhat better, was heartened. Maybe there wouldn't be a medal in this, but at least a citation. Certainly the charges would be dropped.

"Very good," Weatherell said again. "I believe I shall recommend an Order for you, Lieutenant."

Betty had been sitting quietly, but now her eyes popped wide. "For *him*? What about Pete? I mean Ensign Quirt?"

Weatherell inclined his head at her. "Ensign Quirt is fortunate this turned out as well as it did."

Quirt's mind reeled.

CAPTAIN WEATHERELL waved his daughter's protest away. "Naturally, we should be ungrateful if we did not drop the charges against Ensign Quirt. And instead of a dishonorable discharge, we shall allow him to resign his commission."

Quirt felt the blood rushing to his head. "No matter what I do, it's wrong!" he shouted.

Captain Weatherell's gaze frosted him lightly. "It seems so. With a weapon at hand you chose to use your fists, risking completely your momentary advantage.

"Your release from the Lubian control was fortuitous, so you get no credit. From then on you acted on blind impulse, disregarding logic and

probability. I see no reason to withdraw my request for your resignation."

"Well I do."

It was Admiral Kingsley. Until now the white-haired man had made no move, said not a word.

"I do indeed," he said, getting up from his chair. "There will be no resignation unless Ensign Quirt desires. However, he may request a transfer. To my section, if he likes."

Weatherell stiffened, but there was no other show of anger. "You realize you are overriding my decision, sir? Within my own command?"

"I do."

"I shall request a hearing on this."

The admiral smiled. "You may. Your privilege."

The captain was obviously puzzled, as well as angry. "I don't understand. This man runs counter to all the principles on which the Fleet operates. He is the very antithesis of everything we've worked thirty years to make the Fleet represent."

Admiral Kingsley sighed. "I'm afraid so. And a good deal my fault. Thirty years too late I've decided I made a mistake."

The old eyes sought out the portrait of the great Admiral Cantwell on the wall. The eyes looked back across thirty years.

"At the time it seemed wise," he mused aloud. "A new Service. It needed pride in itself. It needed a tradition. I'm afraid we gave it the wrong one."

The old man seemed sad. And yet he had the air of a man from whose shoulders a weight has been lifted.

"The Battle of Bemiji. The triumph of the probability approach." He laughed. "Captain, I'm going to break your heart. I'm going to tell you the true story of that famous victory."

There was a tinge of sarcasm in Weatherell's tone. "I'm sure we'll find it interesting."

"And instructive. You know, Cantwell was in tears."

Kingsley smiled remembering it. "Yes," he cried. With rage and frustration. The master of the minimax and all that.

"You see, Jupiter had us licked. More ships and more firepower. Cantwell had his equations, but so did they. And they were picking our ships off one by one. Every maneuver we tried they matched. And bettered.

"With our tail between our legs we had to run!"

The old man shook his head. "It was pitiful. Cantwell discovered we couldn't even break contact successfully. That was when he cried. He pounded the wall in frustration.

"And then all of a sudden he let out a roar of rage. 'By God, we'll take some of those soandso's with us!'

"And we drove what was left of the Fleet straight at them! It was the last thing in the world they might have expected. It was so insane it caught them completely off guard.

"Later, sure, we rationalized it out. The only possible choice. Logical necessity."

The admiral stopped. He sighed. "For the good of the Fleet," he mused.

Captain Weatherwell had shrunk in his chair. "A myth," he said.

"Yes. And it has outlived its usefulness."

The white-haired man shrugged. "Don't feel too bad. The brain, the equation, probability—those are our tools. But the drive that lifted a puny race out of the slime and made it master of the galaxy—that goes deeper.

"And some day," he shook his finger at Weatherell, "some day—because we're like that—we're going to step outside the galaxy. We'll need men who think odds of fifty to one only make the fight more interesting."

His story had shocked them all, to some extent even Quirt. And his vision afterward had left them in silence. The admiral broke it. He jerked his head at Quirt.

"That's why I want you in my section, Ensign. What do you say?"

"Why..." Quirt hesitated. He looked across at Betty. She got up and went to him and put her arm around him.

"Why... I'd like that very much, sir. That is, if marriage wouldn't be a bar."

"What? Oh." The admiral threw

back his head, laughing. "No indeed. And if I may override Captain Weatherell once more, I'd like the honor of performing the ceremony."

He cocked a white eyebrow at Weatherell, who was smiling faintly. "That's the way to take it. After all, life is that way."

"I suppose it is." Weatherell's smile broadened. "And I'm forgetting myself. Refreshments are in order. Liquid refreshments."

He flipped a switch on his desk and gave the order.

THE END

LIFE CAN SHOCK YOU!

By Ralph Cox

THAT LIFE is electrical, that all living things use chemo-electricity to make them function, is a reality not until now recognized. Recent studies at the Rockefeller Institute by Dr. Shedlovsky indicate that cells are really miniature batteries using electrical current for energy; the conducting substances are water and acids. While the battery analogy is remarkably sound, there is one seeming difference which may go a long way toward explaining some of the difficulties scientists have experienced in actually pinning down the electro-chemico effect. This difference between the life process and ordinary electrical conduction involves the concept of positive electricity, or protons.

In all ordinary electrical processes, from those taking place in a wire to those occurring in a vacuum tube, the flowing element, the moving charge, is always negative; i.e., electrons, negatively charged particles, are the things which move. But apparently the new discoveries suggest that

in living, organic, matter the proton, or nucleus, of the hydrogen atom, the smallest positive charge of electricity, is the thing involved! This startling concept is further reinforced by the study of non-conductors and semi-conductors in which very similar actions take place also utilizing protons.

It appears that biological and physical science are on the verge of a sort of unification which will go far to explain as yet unexplained phenomena of both phases of activity. Till now the proton has been completely overshadowed by its active companion, the electron. The role of the proton in electrical processes has always seemed a stationary one. The famous "glass electrode" probe, a tool using hydrogen gas (in the form of hydrogen ions or protons) is unraveling many mysterious facts in relation to semi-conductors and organic matter. The spark of life is slowly succumbing to analysis and, while it may never be duplicated, at least its nature will be understood!

THEY PLAY WITH BLOCKS!

By Peter Dakin

YOU DON'T think of grown men—engineers—playing with children's building blocks, but some of the things those boys do aren't far removed! And, if the present is any indication of the future, buildings blocks will be as much a part of an engineer's equipment as his slide rule. This is not fantasy or speculation,

but cold, hard fact on which the future will be molded.

Actually what is referred to, of course, is the "modular" notion with which modern industry is beset. This means that a designer or an engineer—particularly the architects—may decide to eliminate the awkward fractions of an inch that so

often appear in the dimensions of a building or even a machine. Thus an architect will not specify a room "14 feet, 12½ inches" long. Instead, he'll make every dimension, from window sizes to floor sizes, a definite multiple of some pre-decided unit, like four or eight inches! And everything—repeat, everything—will be measured in terms of this modular unit. As a result of this metrical standardization homes can be built as fast as they can be put together, without being made all alike.

The modular notion is not completely new. Housebricks constitute a modular unit. So do plywood panels four by eight

feet. Architects have long used these basic units in their work. But the idea can be extended to an infinite variety of odd-sized shapes ranging from windows and doors to fireplaces.

With the living (and, especially, housing) standard of the United States fantastically high, with the rest of the world slowly aspiring to an equivalent standard, the advantages of modular standardization are so obvious as to need no justification. In addition, the esthetic aspect of building is preserved, because the modular construction doesn't determine the shape or size of the structure. Building blocks seem slated to stay!

THEY STAYED UP ALL NIGHT

An "Amazing" Vignette



IT IS cold, airless and dark at eighty thousand feet. But I didn't feel anything but a sort of purring contentment in the comfort of the tight little cockpit of the R-73. I was among the first of our squadron to get the new interceptors with the rocket engines. They made jets look like plug horses. I was on patrol over Northern Canada and I was happy. The life of a pursuit pilot generally is a happy one—and a short one.

"I want you and three others, Keeler, Stein and Helmer, to sit up there for a few hours tonight," Colonel Blake had said. "We're going to try a steady patrol routine, but if radar spots any incoming Red bombers first, of course you'll take your fixes from it. But there's always a chance that the screen won't get them."

"Yeah," I remembered answering, "look what they did to Seattle last week."

Blake said a short dirty word. He looked grim. "Cramer, we've got to stop more of 'em."

I watched the scanner screen. Nothing—yet. The boys were paralleling me, I knew, but we had orders to avoid breaking radio silence no matter what. Red monitors on the raiders would be sure to pick us up if we did. Then what did surprise matter? And surprise was the whole core of knocking fast Red rocket bombers and jets from the Northern skies. Sure, home and city chasers would get 'em—but not until after they'd dumped their load of atomic warheads. And too many were getting through.

Suddenly I noticed greenish pips on the screen. For a minute I thought it might be Reds, but then came the tell-tale pulsing of our own identification radars, so it must be a flight of our operational craft.

I settled back, watching the range click off.

Suddenly I sat erect! Hey, wait a minute. There'd been no notification that we were sending craft out. What if those were Red bombers with captured identification? Their radars were as good as ours. We'd have to go down and have a look-see. They were flying very close and low.

Even as I signaled with wing lights I could imagine Colonel Blake chewing me out for abandoning patrol position. I couldn't take a chance on dropping our altitude, yet I had to. I shoved the wheelstick forward. I saw a few dots of light follow. Then I glued my eyes to the radar. You fly a rocket on instruments, not on sight—things move too fast.

In a minute or two we were within rocket range and the craft beneath us were sitting ducks. For a millisecond I debated whether or not I should break radio silence, fire, or what. I didn't have to decide. I saw orange flashes. They were Red bombers all right—trying a new touch—sneaking in low under outer defenses and under radar umbrellas with fake identification.

It was slaughter!

I touched the automatic fire stud and the first bomber vanished in a fantastic flare of light. Then all hell broke loose as my buddies cut out with their fire. In seven minutes we knocked the eleven-plane flight right out of the sky—or into it—while the Geiger counters chattered madly. Those bombers would never see American cities.

Blake broke silence. "Good work, boys," he said, "Good work..."

—Roy Small

QUEEN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND

By Don Wilcox



A girl with hot lips and a rotten temper stood between them and two billion bucks!

THE LITTLE sky jeep Yellow Jacket was cruising back toward the earth with five disappointed persons aboard, when a radio message abruptly changed its course. Bob Erickson's pulses jumped. "This may change our luck," he said as he returned the signal. Kay Chalmers and her brother were right at his

shoulder waiting to hear what the message would be.

"Bad news?" Kay whispered anxiously. Bob shook his head. Steeple, the elderly little man at the controls, didn't so much as turn his eyes.

A moment later Bob handed a written order to Steeple, and without a word the pilot veered from his B-line



Even as the flame queen drifted off into space, her ordered subjects continued the search

course. Bob watched the dials for a few moments, then relaxed with an easy, "There. It's a faint hope, but it's worth trying."

The five of them had made a futile trip to Venus under the auspices of the Earth-Solar Insurance Company in the hope of recovering a lost shipment of currency. The ship carrying the money had never come in. A cold two billion dollars in American bills had apparently gone off into the ether.

Bob, in charge of the insurance company's errand, had failed to find any clue in Venus, and his inquiries among space men arriving from other planets had availed nothing.

"Call it *joott*," was all the answer anyone could give for space ships that never came in. "Joott" was the space man's word for Just One Of Those Things.

Now, Kay and her brother Randy waited for an explanation, as the earthbound *Yellow Jacket* set its course by the stars. The fifth member of the party, Clip, the fourteen-year-old office boy from Earth-Solar Insurance, who had come on the trip against everybody's orders, noticed that something exciting was in the air and so roused out of his bunk, rubbed his baby-blue eyes and came up to join the group.

"All right, Stowaway," Bob said to Clip, "you came along hoping for some excitement, so make the most of this. It's our last chance for a clue on the disappearance of that two billion. Otherwise, we head for home with a goose egg."

"I never knew you not to get a home run," Clip said, reminding Bob that the kid's hero worship went back to the amateur baseball games in the city park. In the kid's eyes, Bob had been a champion hitter.

"THIS MESSAGE," Bob said, "informs us that a space eddy has

come within range of the Earth-Venus route."

"Within range? Shooting range?"

"Gravitational range. Drawing range. Not many months ago it slid into this field of space. You understand what an eddy is?"

"In a river," Kay said. "It's a pool off to one side of the main current where the driftwood goes round and round."

"It's the same general idea in space, except for an added dimension and many more directions of currents. It's a spot where two or more crisscrossing paths of gravitational attractions exert almost identical pulls, and so there's a point of balance where things drifting in space tend to come to a rest."

"Geel! What'll we find there?" Clip asked.

"That's anybody's guess," Bob said, "but it wouldn't be too surprising if we'd run onto the remains of a wrecked ship or two."

"And maybe two billion dollars?"

Bob watched the countenances of three of his listeners light up into curious smiles. It was at least worth a few thousand extra miles of travel to find out. There was the gruesome side, of course—the possibility that they would find the mangled bodies of those who had, by accident or otherwise, been hurled out of their course.

Randy said, "I trust there's no danger we'll get stuck there."

"How could we?" his sister asked.

"Well, I'm always looking on the dark side of things, but wouldn't it be an ideal place for space bandits? If many navigators know there's something there and cruise over that way to see, just as we're doing . . ."

"Maybe no one else knows," Kay said hopefully.

Her brother, obviously discounting her false optimism, went on, "It could be one of the hottest spots in the sky,

from a legal point of view. Ships that meet on the planets are subject to laws. But when they make contact out in space, who knows what happens?"

"There's a space code, isn't there?" Kay persisted.

"Unfortunately, there's not a policeman on every corner."

"Oh, you!" Kay gestured her hopelessness, smiling at Bob. "My brother is a chronic pessimist."

"I'm glad we have you along for our optimist," Bob said. "However—"

KAY SHOOK her head. "Whenever you say *however*, it means you're going to agree with my brother." She flashed her eyes at Bob and he knew she was teasing. She started to turn away but he stopped her by putting a hand on her shoulder.

"The question is, are we all completely willing to take the risk involved?"

Bob made sure of their individual answers on that question. When Steeple, the silent old pilot, showed no signs of responding, Bob motioned the others to go on back, to leave him alone with Steeple. Here was a typical old space man, Bob thought, observing his yellow wrinkled skin, his steady eye that refused to flicker with any sign of emotion. It would seem that Steeple had long since ceased to feel either the fears or the surges of courage that might fill younger men.

"So we'll not get back to Earth quite as soon as you expected," Bob pursued.

Steeple said nothing. Through thousands of miles he could be as uncommunicative as a turtle. His silence must be taken for his assent.

In the privacy of his own thoughts, Bob sought his own consent. If this venture could add even a grain of success to the trip, his own personal prospects would be brighter. He would like to ask Kay to marry him. They had been only half acquainted when

the excursion started. It had not been a case of love at first sight in the story-book sense, but the hours of companionship had found them growing more and more devoted. She was strong-nerved, afraid of nothing. That buoyant optimism and sparkle which she wore on the surface was an expression of an inner confidence that Bob had discovered was real. And he was terribly eager that her confidence in him shouldn't be misplaced.

Hours later, Clip emitted a shout that rang through the ship like firebells. What he saw at the telescope Bob also had been watching for many minutes. But he allowed Clip the privilege of proclaiming his discovery.

"Hey, everybody! There's something dead ahead. It's a meteoroid—the craziest meteoroid you ever saw! Come and look!"

"What is it? Where? I don't see anything."

"That speck of light. Look at it through the telescope. It's a whole bunch of little specks going round and round."

TO BOB'S eyes it was like dust in the sunshine. At the center it was a solid mass, somewhat spherical in shape.

It grew rapidly. The counter motors had been at work during the past several minutes, slowing the swift space fall until now the ship held nearly motionless in the sky.

"As we approach, we'll doubtless drift around as aimlessly as those specks, spending the remainder of our momentum," Bob said, and tried to imagine how far a little momentum would go under such conditions. Very likely the movement of passengers from one side of the ship to another would be enough to influence the direction of its drift.

The objects moving like lazy electrons around a nucleus gradually took

form as the ship grew close. What a conglomerate lot of nothing, floating around in the highlights and deep shadow, in and out of the sunshine. A junk heap in space! Anything and everything that travelers through the void might discard or lose en route could be seen here. Bob quickly identified a rudder blade and some floating pieces of rocket guns that attested to space battles of some far-off place and time.

Clip said, "Gee, Bob, what a place to set up a second-hand store."

"What a place for a captain to park his stowaways," Bob said, tempering his caustic remark with a wink.

Randy, Bob knew, was already feeling the weight of tragedy in the heaps of wreckage, and was also on the alert for possible trouble. "I don't exactly like the look of that solid core."

"What do you see?"

"Maybe nothing. Maybe a gun pointing out."

"Where?"

"To the left of that black patch that looks like air locks left open."

Kay hummed uneasily. One could see anything, and a pessimist was sure to see the worst. "What we want to see is a black metal box two feet wide with red and white seals."

Bob saw the "gun" that Randy had identified. It was the nose of a red space boat pointing out through the heap, caught like a piece of driftwood in the tangle. There very likely was a gun in that red nose.

The nucleus—the "Floating Island", as Clip called it—was about as large in bulk as a big city railway station, Bob thought. And considerably less solid. It appeared to have the solidity of a thousand circus balloons against a ceiling. The center of the cluster held together like a log jam on a river, while around the sides the unattached objects bounced and tumbled like so

many children's balloons in motionless air.

THE PINKISH, purplish haze that enshrouded the whole area had already been noted by Bob, and it took on an interesting meaning when Kay said, "There's a burning torch going around."

"Burning?"

"Yes. See? It's floating over the top, now—or is it the bottom?"

Directions were quite meaningless, but the burning torch, whatever it was, meant a great deal. It signified the presence of air. However little, there was air to burn. So even the weight of air was enough to cause it to drift, along with other substances, in the gravitational vortex.

The fire was a warning that friction of heavy objects coming together like two ships at sea could set inflammable materials ablaze. He was thinking especially of the metal box with red and white seals.

"Keep your eyes peeled for a two-foot box," he said. "If we can once spot that, our luck does a flipflop. All the rest of this is just so much scenery."

The *Yellow Jacket* moved around in a wide orbit of perhaps five hundred yards, slowly drawing in. They moved into the shadow, and for a few minutes they were peering into what might be called the night's darkness. The "Floating Island" was like a tiny planet, Kay observed, and she went to work to compute its period of rotation. She came up with the information that it turned through a day and a night every fifty-six minutes.

"We've a fair chance to bump into the side, moving with the rotation," Bob observed.

"Good or bad?" Clip asked.

"We could help ourselves in two ways. The more of these outside objects along the surface that we can

bump loose, the more chance we'll have of finding what we're looking for. Then, if our bump should speed up the rotation of this midget planet, we might be able to speed up our own survey."

"Imagine giving a planet a push to make it turn faster!" Kay laughed.

"We might hitch on and tow it back to Earth," Clip suggested.

"We may hitch on by way of anchoring," Bob said, "but any stiff pull would probably jerk the nucleus apart. Steeple, can you give us just a breath of power to bring us in closer?"

IT WAS a shaky landing, when contact was eventually made. Objects bumped out of the path like so many croquet balls floating in water. The impact sent a slice of drifting metal off at a tangent with force enough so that it would probably never find its way back.

"How far do you think it will go?" Clip asked, watching it through the telescope.

"All the way to another planet, maybe, or to the sun," Bob ventured. "On the other hand, it may coast out a few thousand miles and lose its momentum and be drawn back to this point."

"Gee, Bob, from here you could bat a baseball all the way to the sun, couldn't you?"

And that was just about the last moment, as Bob later recalled, that anyone felt gay or carefree. The impending tragedy which Randy Chalmers had vaguely sensed was close at hand.

"There it is!"

"The box?"

"See it—way back there. Red and white stickers. It seemed to be drifting after us. It's gone down now."

"Where?"

"Back of that ridge of metal—over to the right."

"Something pulled it down," Kay said. "It must have caught on something."

BOB DONNED a space suit, passed through the air locks, and crawled out onto the heaps of wreckage. He was as light as nothing. The air was firmer than he had expected; he felt that he could almost swim in it, but he was afraid of drifting out of reach of the solid things he wanted to hold on to.

A line of rusted steel cable sagged across his path, and he carefully crawled under it. Farther on he came to a line of rope. He stared. This looked very much as if someone had placed it in that exact spot. For what purpose? Was it a device to hold the "planet" together? Was this place by any chance inhabited?

He swung under the rope and crawled—pawing along weightlessly—toward the point where Kay and Randy had seen a box disappear. Suddenly he froze in his tracks. Ahead of him were moving figures.

There were three men, naked and golden skinned, with flowing hair and rippling muscles. They were a weird picture of strength and deformity, for not one possessed the normal physique of an athlete.

One was legless, but he moved as easily in this realm as a fish in water. Another was cruelly bent, perhaps with the crippling affliction of arthritis. A third possessed a twisted arm that hung over his back, useless.

All three men were working with long hooks, as slender as fishpoles, with shepherd's-staff crooks. They were facile and clever in their motions, obviously acclimated to this realm. Not completely naked, they wore bands of brilliant purple, and Bob saw at once that they carried ray pistols.

They were drawing the box in with

their hooks. The man with the useless arm clung to the path with the grip of his feet, seeming to know when to let go his anchor, and when to freeze on with a toe hold against the caprices of momentum. The three played such teamwork that one might deliberately float outward to exert a push on the box, knowing that one of his companions would draw him back with the hook.

It was the box, Bob was sure of that.

He clambered ahead as fast as he could safely go. Their part of the planet was passing into shadow. He must see where they were going.

He bumped into a rope, and an explosion occurred. Fire burst out of a crate a few yards to his left. The bang of a bomb roared into his helmet.

FLASH! ANOTHER bomb to his right. The reverberations rattled through his phones. He ducked back. He knew he had set off a series of warning signals.

They were coming toward him, bounding like track men over hurdles. The legless one scrambled onto an elevation, hand over hand, perched himself, drew a pistol, and waited like a sentinel.

Bob held to a piece of copper railing, placed a fist on his hip, and watched them advance.

The bad-armed one confronted him, and the heavy, sullen voice hummed in through the phones.

"You don't need that helmet. We've got air enough."

It wasn't an altogether unfriendly beginning. Bob removed his helmet and let it hang at his back. The deformed man before him had a solid face, a sturdy mouth and a heavy jaw. Glazed of eye, bright gold of skin, lightly clothed in purple, he presented

a picture of unreality that made Bob think of a circus sideshow. But his crusty words meant business.

"What are you doing here?"

"I might ask you the same question," Bob said.

"I belong here. I am a servant of her majesty, Queen Dezeeta."

"Queen who?"

"Queen Dezeeta—and speak the name with respect, please."

"I never heard of her. Who is she?"

"The owner of this planet."

"Planet?"

"We've been watching your approach for several minutes. You'll pardon us if we haven't brought a brass band out to meet you."

"Brother, you've got everything else here. But we don't want a band, and we don't care to step on the toes of any queen who claims this as her planet. We'd just like to pick up one small piece of merchandise."

"You'll pick up nothing."

Bob met that one with all the impetuous pent-up feelings of an agent who, up to this moment, had been a dismal failure. "We'll take what's ours, no more, no less. Don't try to throw any stumbling blocks in our path. We've got a weapon in that ship that can blow this little planet of yours right across the sky."

The man with the bad arm was smiling a twisted smile that spoke evil and defiance and murder. "*Brother!*"

JUST THAT, nothing more. There was something in the way he said it that drilled at Bob's curiosity. They stared at each other. The legless man, hand after hand, had moved closer, and now he spoke the single word, "*Brother!*"

The man with the bent back looked pained and said nothing.

"Your manner of addressing us is prophetic," Bad-Arm said. "Within the

hour you may be our brother. We are subjects of Her Majesty, and we find it quite convenient to do exactly what she commands. Something tells me she can use you, too. If so, we shall be glad to treat you as a young brother deserves to be treated."

"So you're slaves!" Bob said.

"Servants is the polite term, brother!"

The man with the painfully folded back now stepped closer and spoke in a slow, uneasy manner. "The queen gave us orders."

"Right." Bad-Arm assumed his best air of authority. "I almost forgot, Brother. You and your party are invited to be the guests of the queen. Please come at once with us."

"We didn't come here to make a social call." Bob intended to stand his ground. "This piece of merchandise—"

"If you're here on a shopping tour, you may do your talking with the queen."

"And if we don't?"

"We have some interesting weapons, too." Bad Arm made a swinging gesture with his good right arm.

Gunfire blazed from somewhere around the planet's curve. A piece of wreckage bounced out into the whirl of things, and another blast of gunfire struck it squarely. It shattered and went flying off in fragments. Momentum carried the pieces out and on, and Bob doubted whether they would ever find their way back to this part of the sky. It wasn't a pleasant prospect, when applied to a ship, a box of currency, or a person.

"We don't like to waste ammunition," Bad-Arm said. "You and your party will find the queen very congenial company."

Bob relayed the edict to those in the *Yellow Jacket*. Orders were for Steeple to remain. As to the others, he had no commands. He could only repeat what had been told him, and

point out that the gunfire was the queen's own punctuation mark to her invitation.

"We'll not have you going in alone," Randy replied.

A few minutes later, Randy, Kay and Clip emerged from the air locks. Bob made the ship fast, and the four of them followed the afflicted trio of slaves into a passageway that led into a lighted room.

IT WAS a well-appointed spaceliner interior. Whether it was a complete ship, buried within the Floating Island's heap, or only the passenger accommodations of a crippled ship, made no particular difference for its present function. It was the palace of a queen who lived here, safely hidden within the interior of the little "planet" which she had chosen to rule.

Bob had counted ten slaves by the time he and his party were seated in the parlor-like surroundings. Soft lights added luster to the rich red rugs and the red and blue-upholstered furniture.

The slaves, like the first three Bob had encountered, were faultlessly polite and obedient. All were unfortunate physical specimens, each with his own affliction or deformity. Each too, Bob thought, possessed a strangely sinister quality, so that every polite remark, invitation, or act of courtesy carried its own overtone of threat. The queen must have trained them well.

The slaves came to attention when chimes tinkled from one of the entrances. The queen entered.

The flash and glitter of diamonds was what Bob saw first. Queenly in stature and bearing, the tall, regal woman walked in. She seated herself in front of the party, allowing herself the luxury of gazing a moment at each one before speaking. The coldness of her eyes was more than a bluff, Bob thought. She could un-

doubtedly kill a man without ever blinking.

She placed a finger to her cheek. She wore a ruby-studded ornament at her throat and a ruby-studded tiarra in her beautifully waved black hair. The lines of her face were severe. She was handsome, forcefully handsome, with a hard look of authority that had doubtless been exercised upon her slaves every hour since her kingdom had begun.

Her costume consisted of a minimum of fabric; it was all ornament, exposing the ivory whiteness of her slender, shapely body. A circling of pearls accentuated the graceful curves of her breasts.

"Are there only four of you?" A faint mockery touched her lips, as if she already knew there were more.

"Five," said Bob. "We left one in the ship."

"Your most expendable member, I trust."

"What do you mean by that?"

"If I should be displeased," the queen said, "at an instant's notice I might decide to blow up your two-bit skyboat. It would be a pity to execute a handsome young guy without seeing him first."

"It would be a damn shame to execute our pilot, even if he isn't young and handsome."

"You've very obligingly answered the question that was in my mind."

"Say, what is this, a gangster hide-out?"

"Watch your speech, my fine friend. You happen to be in the presence of royalty."

ROYALTY! Her speech sounded to Bob like the mongrel tongue of a gangster's moll trying to pass in high society. Her arrogant manner was so insulting it was all he could do to hold his temper. Kay and Randy were sitting back as stiff as boards, leaving

it to him to try to outguess this she-devil who called herself a queen. And Clip had edged off toward the nearest exit, had stopped there when confronted by a shabby-looking slave, and was now apparently looking for some way to escape to the outside.

Bob said, "What kind of kingdom is this? Do you made a habit of shooting first and declaring war afterward? What reason could you have for threatening to blow up our space ship?"

"You have made a grave error in coming here," the queen said, rising. "You have approached my planet like a boatload of thieves. You at once began to plunder."

"See here, we're cruising through the open sky, and we're conducting ourselves according to our sky rights."

"You have no sky rights here," she said, meeting his eye in a way that sent fighting chills through him. "This is my planet. Everything on it is my property. Your first obligation when you arrive at a new planet is to report to the government of that planet. My men practically had to drag you in by force to pay your respects to me and my government."

"Did you expect us to know you were here? There weren't any signs."

"I expected you to inquire."

"All right, we're here," Bob said savagely. "What do you want?"

"You should have bowed when I entered the room."

"Now wait a minute. Where I come from—"

"I know exactly where you come from. I know who you are and why you came."

Bob took a moment to absorb the shock of that statement. Did she know, or was she bluffing? He gave one quick glance around the wide room, hoping against hope that he might catch sight of the coveted box. No such luck.

"All right," he said angrily, rising and returning the challenge of her glare. "Play your cards, Queen. Spill it. If you know why we came, tell us. Why?"

"You were sent here by Earth governments to see whether it's true that I've set up my own kingdom here in space, and you're going to demand that I get out or be reported. There!"

Bob's jaw dropped, his eyes widened, and suddenly he lost his grip on his dignity and let out a raucous laugh. "Haw-haw-haw! Queenie, you're a card! Your imagination has been working overtime. You're so far off the trail you must be in the wrong solar system."

KAY NUDGED him, and he cut his laughter short. The queen's face had lighted up with a pinkness that had turned red and then fairly purple. She gave an unintelligible shout of fury, and six slaves moved in and took their places at her side. They were fingering the pistols that hung in their purple sashes, and for an instant Bob thought that he was going to become a part of a mass execution.

With quick recovery of her lost poise, the bejeweled lady said in tones of icy dignity, "Please excuse me for a moment. When I return I shall have a plan for you."

She turned and marched toward the exit, escorted by two slaves. Four slaves stood immobile, watching Bob and the others. Then, at the faint sound of chimes, they retired to their doors to stand guard.

Kay whispered, "Did you notice her left arm?"

"It was in bandages," Randy whispered. "It was only half an arm. There's been some kind of violence here."

"We'd better break out of this in a hurry," Bob said. "With or without that box, we'd better be moving."

"It would be a shame not to get it when we know it's here," Kay said. "I've half a scheme in the back of my head. . . . A woman's wits can sometimes outsmart another woman, you know."

"Did you see how she looked at me?" Randy asked.

"How?"

"Sort of—well, not meaning to be egotistical, but I thought she showed a gleam of—well, something, I can't say just what."

"I never knew you to be caught for words before," Kay said. "Do you have any notion that you could talk to her and get a reasonable deal out of her?"

"That's what I was wondering." Randy rose and began to pace. "Bob, do I have your permission to go and talk with her personally? Entirely at my own risk, you understand."

Bob found his lips too tight with anger to answer readily. He was marching back and forth across the red rug, feeling like a caged animal.

"Keep your guns ready," he whispered. "We may have to fulfill her prediction after all. Where's Clip?"

"He skipped out when she called the guards up. He must be on the outside." Kay took Bob's hand. "Bob, dear—"

"We'll try not to let anything happen. You mean too much to me," Bob said quietly. "Take it easy."

"If I could get back to the ship—"

"You and Randy should both go back, right away. Randy—where did he go?"

IN THE PRIVACY of her council room, Dezeeta permitted herself the queenly luxury of exploding with rage in the presence of her dwarfed little prime minister, Mogarr.

"Take it easy," Mogarr soothed in his low, heavy voice. "Tell me what

you're talking about. Maybe I can help you."

"Why do you think they're here? Why?"

"My, my, Her Majesty is in a fury! You're really burned up!"

"Don't say 'burned' to me."

"Sorry."

"I've made a damned miserable mistake. I thought—oh, never mind what I thought."

The little squirrel-like prime minister crawled up from the arm of the chair onto the back, where he had a better chance to look her in the eye. "I know what you thought. You thought it was government agents again. You're destroying yourself with that worry, Dezeeta. I've told you before."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Here you have everything your own way, all the wealth in the skies, and comfort and heat, air and food—every luxury that broken-down space liners can offer—and still you go on worrying for fear your game's up. Everything in the world to make you happy—"

"Not quite."

"And every time a ship approaches you—"

"Don't taunt me. I'm human like everyone else."

"Careful. Queens don't usually admit—"

"Shut up!"

"If you have such a fear of every passing space ship, why don't you apply the one tried and true method? Why bring them in for a regal show? Why not simply open fire at first opportunity and let the slaves pick up the pieces?"

"You know why," she said coldly.

The dwarfed little Mogarr nodded solemnly and crawled down from the back of the chair and folded up in it like a cat. He put his fingers over his eyes. He spoke in a tone of injury.

"Oh, yes, you've promised yourself the luxury of a man. A new man..."

"A man—not half a man."

"A man—a real man—to make love to you. Unfortunately, I'm no longer a novelty to you. I'm the brain that makes you a queen, you don't mind my being that. But when it comes to sharing your favors—"

"Don't start that, Mogarr. We've no time to dig up our petty troubles."

"All right. Shall I give the order to fire at their ship?"

"Not just yet. Have you seen the two men?"

"Dimly, through the curtain. Does either of them look interesting to you?"

"Both of them."

"Ho-ho! Lady luck has smiled double all at once. Well, which one will it be, or have you decided to make kings out of both of them with a stroke of your personal magic?"

DEZEETA STUDIED him for a moment. If she could conveniently get rid of the rest of the party... But that would doubtless offend both men, so that neither would behave to best advantage. An appearance of an accident to the others would be preferable.

"If it's that hard to decide," said her counsellor, "entice them both and let them fight it out."

"Mogarr, you do still come up with a streak of brilliance now and then. That is exactly what I'll do. If I knew what they were here for..."

"The one had begun searching for a box of merchandise when our blundering slaves made haste to usher them into your presence. By the way, what was that last box they brought in? It had an important look—seals and such."

"It was weightless."

"Everything's weightless. Here, let's take a look." Mogarr drew the box

out of the heap at the corner of the room. Then he looked up to see a stranger standing in the doorway, watching him. "Well!"

"I hope you don't think I was spying," the tall young man said hastily. "I was about to knock—"

Dezeeta rose and walked over toward the door, staring at him dubiously at first; then as he smiled she decided to welcome him. She turned to see that Mogarr was thrusting the new box through what had once been the airlocks of this one-time space liner. The tunnel beyond that exit was concealed by the well-packed heaps of wreckage and refuse. He locked the airlocks and pocketed the key. From the outer surfaces of the planet the box would never be reached. Not unless one went to the trouble of tearing the planet apart to find the tunnels.

She returned her attention to the mild-mannered, smiling young man.

"My name is Randy Chalmers. If I'm not intruding—"

"Your friend didn't bother to make introductions," Dezeeta said. "But I assumed that you and the girl are husband and wife. Or is she—?"

"She's my sister."

"You needn't lie to me. I can see you want to make a good impression on the queen. Well, don't begin by lying. Sit down and tell me why you came in here."

Randy remained standing. "It happens she's my sister. I'm not used to being thought a liar. What reason would I have to—"

Dezeeta reached to catch his hand, and he yielded uncertainly.

"The reason is obvious. You've suddenly been privileged to meet someone who has turned your head. You needn't be ashamed of falling in love with me, Randy. I could see it in your eyes when we first met." Dezeeta motioned to the dwarf at the other side of the room. "Mogarr, you may go."

The tall young man objected. "No, I'd rather he wouldn't go. I'd like to talk to both of you."

"Go," Dezeeta said to Mogarr, and he obeyed.

"Wait," Randy objected. "He has the key—"

"Any key he has couldn't be of the slightest interest to us, dear," Dezeeta said, drawing the young man over to the sofa.

RANDY'S SUAVE manner had quickly worn out. She saw a hard defiance come into his soft features. He refused to sit down on the sofa. He refused the drink she offered. He drew his hand away from hers roughly and talked not as one should talk to a queen. He treated her as he might treat a drunken bum who blocks the way or asks for a handout.

"Let's get a few things straight, madam," he said hoarsely. "I didn't come in here to make love to you."

"You might give yourself a chance. You're afraid of yourself in my presence, I can see that. You're afraid of your own strength. Let yourself, relax, sweetheart. You're in the arms of the queen; you're all right; nothing can happen to you—"

"I was trying to tell you about that box. It's ours. It contains—"

"Will you forget it, Randy darling? Have you ever in your life had an opportunity like this—to give your love to a queen?"

"Queen be damned," Randy snarled. "That box, I tell you it contains two billion dollars, and you've got it. I saw it. I know where you put it. And if you don't fork it over—"

"Two billion dollars, did you say?"

"We represent the insurance company. We've got to recover it, and if you don't release it—"

"Mogarr!" Dezeeta stepped to the wall and touched a signal button. In a moment Mogarr walked in. Back of

him came six purple-sashed slaves. One of them carried a long canvas sack. Another came toward Randy with a hypodermic needle.

"What are you going to do?" Randy asked.

"I've discovered that I despise you," Dezeeta said. "I'm going to give you your freedom. It will only take a minute."

The needle went into his arm and he began to sag almost immediately. They tied him up in the sack so that he was only a bundle of canvas. They took him outside. One of the slaves hurled him out into space, and when he had floated out about a hundred feet they turned guns on him and blasted him to bits. The dust of what had been Randy Chalmers went out on its endless journey into space.

TEN SLAVES could not be everywhere at once, and that is why Bob and Kay were able to slip back to the *Yellow Jacket*. They had hurried back to alert Steeple to the danger. They found that Steeple was gone. The *Yellow Jacket*, anchored as securely as possible, was left unguarded.

Before they had time to gather their wits together, Bob and Kay looked out to see the tragedy of the canvas sack being hurled into the sunlight and blasted to hell. With feelings of horror they guessed what had happened.

A moment later Clip reached them, white and breathless, and confirmed their worst suspicions.

Clip had been spying and had seen the dwarf Mogarr hide the money box and pocket the key. Clip had left off eavesdropping while the queen was putting the pressure on Randy, to try to survey the hiding place of the money from the outside. He had come back in time to see the slaves marching out into the sunlight with the canvas bag, and had picked up enough

of their conversation with the queen to learn that the unconscious body of Randy was being disposed of.

The rest they had seen.

"They claim they could turn the guns on this ship, and I don't doubt it."

"Any minute now."

"It won't happen till she's had a chance at you," Clip said. "I heard enough to know that she had her eye on both you and Randy. That's how Randy got in bad. She tried to get sweet on him and he just plain knocked her ears down."

"Poor guy," Kay breathed through her stifled sobs. "He seemed to know there was tragedy ahead for him."

"All the money in the mints couldn't be worth it," Bob said, holding her close. She breathed deep with courage, then, and began to pull herself together.

"If we had Steeple we could pull away this minute," Bob said. "Money or no money."

"We're not defeated yet, Bob," Kay said. "If a woman's wits can be of any service—"

"You're still fighting, aren't you, Kay, in spite of what's happened." Bob drew a deep breath. "All right, if you have a plan that doesn't run too great a risk, let's act fast."

"What was your own plan, Bob?"

"By now she's looking for us, I would guess. She's mad because we've walked out of her parlor, but she thinks she has us on the run. She'll not turn her guns on this ship just yet. She'd like a chance to try me out first."

"So—"

"So I could go in and stall for time, while you and Clip beat a trail out around this junk heap and start moving the surface wreckage. It's light as a feather, and if you, Kay, can stall the guards off with pistols, Clip can dig like a dog after a hidden bone. I'll

not take a false move off of the queen. After what's happened to Randy, believe me, I'll put a ray through her heart if she gets any notion about loading me into a sack."

Kay nodded. "Your plan and mine are almost identical, except that you and I should trade places. You go with Clip and start digging. You'll do better than I at that. And I'll go back into the parlor and stall the queen."

"You wouldn't be safe. She'd—"

"She'd do nothing but listen, because I'm going in to tell her you're in love with her. I'll tell her that you and I have quarreled, that I'm furious with you, that you and I are finished."

"You think she'll listen?"

"No woman in the world can resist that kind of talk, queen or peasant. Believe me, I'll be safe long enough for you to find Steeple. Find the money if you can, and we'll all meet back at the ship. How soon?"

"Fifty-six minutes," Bob said. "That'll be one complete rotation for this ball of wreckage."

QUEEN DEZEETA and her dwarfed prime minister with their six-slave escort marched back into their luxurious quarters in a spirit of triumph. The slaves took their positions at the doors or returned to their normal tasks. The dispatching of Randy Chalmers had been all in the day's work.

Dezeeta was not surprised to find that her other guests had walked out. They might or might not know what had happened; it made no difference to her. Her one passion now was to win over the other man.

"I think he won't be long coming back."

"You've talked with him already," Mogarr reminded her.

"There was nothing final about our talk. Even if we quarreled, he was ex-

tremely attractive. Unfortunately, I took him to be a government agent. I was mistaken."

"You were downright burned up."

"I wish you wouldn't use that expression." Dezeeta glanced at her bandaged half-arm.

"You're lucky to be alive, Your Majesty, after what happened not too many days ago. If I hadn't come to your rescue with a quick amputation, you would have been burned up."

"All right, gloat!" Dezeeta said. She turned her back to him. He had climbed up on the back of the chair to try to impress her with his taunting lips. She hated him, but it was true, he had quelled the rebellion of the slaves that had threatened her rule, and she supposed she would have to go on acting grateful. What she needed was a man—a real man like that fellow Bob. If she could possess him, yet keep him securely under her thumb—ah, that was the dream of many a queen down through history, wasn't it?

Until now she had not allowed any such well-built, fully developed man to remain alive on her planet. There was always the fear that such a person would try to usurp her power. And so she had spared the lives only of those who were crippled or deformed, or so hurt by illness that they offered no threat. And yet even they in their infirmities had banded together and threatened her.

A freak circumstance had given their rebellion its deadliest effect. The memory of it horrified her. It had cost her an arm. True, it had been, in a way, her own doing. The slaves, once they had cornered her, had told her she possessed an infirmity of her own. They told her that certain Venus foods, those rich delicacies upon which she constantly feasted, had made her *inflammable*.

Absurd, she had said.

THEY HAD dared her to touch her fingers with a lighted match. She had sneered at their grotesque mockery and had applied a blaze to her fingertips. The hand had begun to burn. She doused it in water, but it kept burning. She couldn't extinguish it. The slaves had looked on, then, not in glee but with simple curiosity at first, later with pity. At once they had seized her and made ready to hack off her arm. Mogarr had come to the rescue, after a fashion. With the aid of a local anesthetic, he had performed a swift amputation and hurled the blazing forearm out into the air.

To this hour it was still circling around the planet, still blazing, a grim reminder.

She bitterly recalled the details of this crisis. Remarkably enough, the rebellion of the slaves had ended with the arm-burning incident. The deformed and crippled had gone back to their stations quietly. She was one of them now.

"All right, gloat," she repeated to Mogarr. "But don't be reminding me that I'm burned up. The expression isn't becoming."

"Sorry," said the little prime minister. He had moved across to the door that led into the big parlor. "Your visitor has returned, Your Majesty."

"I thought so. Is he alone?"

"It's the she. She's brought some packages."

"Well. Surprise for the queen, no doubt," Dezeeta said sarcastically. "I don't think she'll be here long."

Queen Dezeeta assumed her best regal manner and walked in to confront Kay. "You must have had a very good reason for coming back to us this way."

The girl spoke in a lifeless monotone, studying the red rug at her feet, occasionally looking up. Dezeeta pres-

ently offered her a chair. She found the girl's words extremely flattering. For several minutes Dezeeta listened with absorbed attention.

"I see," Dezeeta said finally. "You're really through with him, aren't you?"

"I'm through with love altogether," Kay said coldly.

"Yes, I don't blame you. But with Bob, it was simply a case of your not being suited."

"I'm not blaming Bob. But our quarrel was too bitter for me ever to forget. And then—"

"Then I came into the picture?" Dezeeta prompted.

"Yes. I could see plainly enough what happened to him when you two met. He tried to disguise his feelings. His quarrel with you was a sham, though you would hardly know it."

"A coincidence," Dezeeta said, quick to seize a way out of her former embarrassment. "No one would guess that the harsh things I said to him about being a government agent were just my way of putting him to a test. So you say he really fell—"

"I'm sure you'd like to know some of his little peculiarities."

LATER THE girl began to unwrap the packages. Dresses. Finery she had purchased on Venus when she had been looking forward to her own happiness. And now there was so little left to live for.

"I'm offering them to you for a price."

The dresses were gorgeous creations. Dezeeta had often felt her own poverty in this one respect; for seldom out of the masses of beachcomber wealth that floated into her realm did she pick up the sort of wardrobe she might have chosen on a trip to one of the great planets. She hardly heard the girl's words, she was so entranced with this find.

"I'm offering them for a price," Kay repeated.

"Price?" Dezeeta sniffed. "What's your price?"

"Something that has little value to you, since you have everything."

"Name it."

"Two billion dollars. The currency in a certain black metal box you've taken in."

"Why, you damned highway robber!"

"They'd look beautiful on you. Bob hasn't seen me wear them."

Dezeeta called Mogarr. "That box you were putting away earlier, Mogarr, bring it here."

Mogarr brought it in a moment later, muttering that he thought it would be empty, it was so light; besides, it had the look of something that had been discarded by space bandits. The red and white seals on it were slit.

"Open it," Dezeeta commanded.

Kay leaned forward. Mogarr opened the box. It was empty.

Kay gave an astonished "Oh!" and hastily gathered up her dresses, packing them away. Dezeeta, having ordered Mogarr to take the empty box away, now placed a restraining hand on Kay's wrist.

"You needn't put them away."

"I'll take them back to the *Yellow Jacket*," Kay said.

"They might be destroyed there, you know. I'll thank you to leave them here—your wardrobe and your man—"

"They weren't a gift. The price was two billion."

"A queen doesn't have to buy. I'll take them, please." Dezeeta reached for the boxes in her most queenly manner.

Kay rose and faced her. "You don't leave me much to live for, do you?"

"I thought of that, too. I think we

can manage to release you from the burdens of your drab existence right away." Dezeeta rang for Mogarr and six slaves.

BOB AND Clip had skipped out over the rolling, tumbling landscape and gone to work like beavers. They discovered, as soon as they began tossing up a dust of floating objects, that two slaves meant to make trouble for them. They had no time for argument. Clip slipped about so that he popped up from an unexpected position and told them his pistol meant business.

The two slaves backed away, at the same time calling some sort of signal for help. Bob spotted slave number three in the act of taking an aim at Clip. "Down, Clip."

Clip fell. Bob darted for the nearest cover, blasting a series of shots from his ray pistol. Slave number three fell dead. The first two tried to rush in. Clip hurled a slab of steel that collided with them. They meant to shoot it out, and they went down shooting.

Clip took their weapons for good measure. "That's three dead, Bob."

"That leaves seven, and the queen and the dwarf."

"If we can pick them off one at a time we'll even up the score," Clip exulted. "We've got a fighting chance. There's still four of us."

"Three. Unless Steeple shows up we can count him lost."

"Yeah, Steeple. What do you think?"

"They probably tortured him for information, and blasted him out into space from the blind side of the planet," Bob said glumly. "If they've got him imprisoned somewhere in this junk heap, I don't know how in the devil we'd ever find him."

They worked uninterrupted for several minutes, and their digging ef-

forts were rewarded with what might prove a short cut to their goal. They found a tunnel. It had a well-worn look as the sunlight sent long rays into it.

"Look, Clip. There's another one. That's at least eleven."

Bob pointed to the farther shadows where the figure of a slave darted away. The sun just caught the purple of his abbreviated costume and the gleaming gold of his legs as he bolted out of sight.

"We'd better take it easy. They know these paths, and the advantages are all theirs. Now that we're really getting into this, we may find many more. Just when we thought we had them all placed."

THEY MOVED forward cautiously. Clip's sense of direction was good. From his earlier surveys he was dead certain that the path to the left must lead down to the exit from the embedded luxury liner.

"Then the box of currency is bound to be this way."

"Unless they've already carted it off," Clip said.

Wreckage and refuse had made the interior more solid than Bob had guessed. These paths had surely been here for years; they were like solid earth. Yet the luxury liner was at the center of things, proving that the whole mass had grown together out of space drift.

Clip ran back to the surface to make sure the coast was clear, and scrambled back to Bob breathlessly. "One of the slaves is over at our ship, trying to get in."

"He couldn't do it, could he?"

"He was working at the air locks. I didn't wait to see."

"It's locked. Come on, we'll make a run for the box and then get out of here."

They found the subterranean air locks at the dead end of the tunnel. Here was the wall of metal that formed the outside of the queen's palace. They shone a light, and saw the dust print that had been made by the box. It wasn't there. It wasn't anywhere around.

"A damn wild goose chase," Bob muttered. "They had only to unlock from the inside and pull the box back in."

"Shall I try from the inside, or stay here and let you—"

The kid was well nerved, Bob thought; yes, he had the good background of baseball in the city park, of teamwork. And his faith in Bob was an inspiration.

"Our time's practically gone," Bob said. "We'll get back to Kay the quickest way."

They hurried along a shortcut tunnel that one of the slaves had taken. Why, Clip asked, had Bob spoken of him as slave Number eleven?

"He was one I hadn't seen before."

"You mean you remember all their lost arms and legs?"

"Don't ask me to count off," Bob said, "but this was one that appeared to have no physical afflictions. So I knew I hadn't seen him before."

THE SLAVE they were speaking of was the one whom Clip had seen at the entrance of the *Yellow Jacket*, apparently, for that was where they saw him now. The *Yellow Jacket* and its surroundings were passing into the shadow of night, but the purple flash of the slave garb and the quick swing of the bright golden arm holding a deadly pistol gave Bob an instant's warning.

"He sees us! He's going to shoot!" Clip's words were lost in the exchange of zipping flashes.

The golden-skinned slave tumbled

backward, and the weapon swung out of his hand and bounced weightlessly down the side of the ship.

"You got him!" Clip cried. "A phenomenal shot!"

"Yes, Clip. He may not be dead. You take charge of him while I go for Kay. Watch everything."

Bounding, bouncing, literally flying into the guarded room, Bob stopped short in time to get the full benefit of an interesting sight. Kay was holding a pistol on the queen and Mogarr, just daring them to try to stop her. She was backing away—and then Bob saw the slave who was creeping up, arm upraised, clutching an instrument with a bright needle-shaped point.

Zing! Bob shot him down. Kay sidestepped and the swing of the needle barely missed her. Three guards whirled, shooting wildly. Bob cut them with his pistol. Their twisted forms fell to the floor.

Even so, the queen tried to stop him with a bluff. "You're being heroic to the last, aren't you!" She started toward him, smiling like a gay hostess at a party. "Beautiful shooting, my hero. Trying to make the girl think you've come to rescue her! Well, Bob, you can drop the pretense. She knows you're in love with me."

"Like I'm in love with rattlesnakes," Bob snarled. "Get away from those signals. You'll get no answers. I've scattered your slaves all over the place."

"You wild-eyed murderer!"

"Including the able-bodied one who meant to make off with our ship."

"Able-bodied?"

"Now give us the money box or you'll crumple to the floor, all of you!"

THE DWARF, lips quivering, clung to the top of a chair protesting. "It's empty. There's nothing in it.

Some space bandit got to it first. The seals had been slit."

Kay said hastily, "He's right, Bob. They never found anything in it."

Holding guns on them, Bob ushered her out. In the darkness of the planet's night they made their way to the *Yellow Jacket*. Clip was ready for them, cutting loose the moorings.

"Quick, Clip. Here's the key. They'll get to their big guns as fast as they can. Any sign of Steeple yet?"

"Dead," Clip said. "That's Steeple—that slave that began shooting at us from these airlocks."

By the dim light Bob and Kay examined the golden-skinned figure in the purple trunks and sash.

"Looks like he belonged here," Bob muttered.

Clip shouted, "Watch it, Bob, they're heading for the guns."

"Climb aboard, both of you, and I'll follow as soon as I get rid of that flying torch."

Bob groped along looking for something with which to strike. He could see the silhouetted figures of the queen and her party gathering around the protruding nose of a hunk of wreckage that contained an imbedded cannon. Bob reasoned that if the burning torch drifted across the top of the *Yellow Jacket*, it would show up as a perfect target. Otherwise there would be a few minutes' wait for daylight before the slaves, could fire with any accuracy. He intended to meet that drifting torch halfway.

He picked up a straight steel beam and swung it like a giant baseball bat. He struck the torch—a burning human arm—and he remembered something Clip had once said about it. The burning object drove like a skyrocket. He watched it go straight for its mark.

The distant silhouette of the queen

of the torch. Bob saw her dodge; he heard her scream; the torch—her own burning arm—skimmed the top of her head and ignited her. In an instant she was a *queen of flames*.

THE SLAVES and Mogarr could be seen trying desperately to wrap her in coverings. She darted away from their touch. They leaped to try to catch her. She moved outward. Their efforts blundered, they struck her with something, and her flaming body spun outward, far out in the realm of objects floating lazily about the little planet. The burning arm had mysteriously attached itself again, fused with fire.

Her life must have gone at once, Bob thought, for she floated with a languid grace, like a statue that was fire and cloud and woman—in the fullest glory of queenliness she would ever attain. Would she remain a burning statue for hours, days or years? Would the dwarf and the remaining slaves worship her as a queen of flame? Bob wondered....

Bob, Kay and Clip were far out in space before they recovered themselves sufficiently to discuss what had happened. Bound for the earth, three disappointed people, heartsick over the tragedy of Randy, they were nevertheless thankful that they had come through their awful ordeal alive and whole.

They talked of Steeple, and reasoned out, as best they could, what he must have attempted. He had seen much of the world of space; undoubtedly he had already known his way around this little private world of Dezeeta's. Obviously he had known the tunnels, and had seen his chance to break away with the cool two billion dollars for himself. He may have had his hands on the money.

"We might have recovered it if we hadn't shot him," Clip said gloomily,

"but on the other hand, we wouldn't have lived to tell about it if we hadn't shot first."

Kay speculated moodily. "If he *had* got the money, what would he have done with it? Planted it on that pile of wreckage and picked it up later?"

"If he had got to the ship with it," Bob said, "he'd have locked it in his own trunk, first thing, and then—say, do you suppose—"

They pried the locked trunk open and discovered they were carrying a cargo of two billion dollars, American currency.

"Well, that beats all. He brought it in here—he had a chance for a clean getaway—and he must have started back for something."

"What?"

"That's what I can't figure out," Bob said. "Yes, maybe I can, now that I recall his hours of silence. You know, he must have had a lot of thoughts no one knew anything about."

"He must have gone back for something more important to him than any of us would have guessed. But we should have, because a man like that has other dreams besides money, and the two billion dollars would have given him a wonderful sense of power."

"You mean," Kay said hazily, "that he had an impulse to kidnap someone to take along with him?"

"Someone, yes. We'll never know who."

"The queen, of course!" Kay said suddenly. "He'd been in this realm before, and all along he'd been scheming to come back some day and get her."

"Perhaps you're right," Bob said. "It may have been the queen he wanted. And again it may have been—" he cast a glance at Kay—"someone far more beautiful."

THE END



THE LUNATIC CYCLE

By Jon Barry

FROM THE earliest times, from troglodytes crouching in their caves to modern farmers cultivating their fields with tractors, men have been influenced by the phases of the Moon. The moon (*luna*) has long been believed to be the cause of *lunacy*, and even today many people will tell you that lunar cycles affect the growth of crops and the lives of human beings. Even science has been conscious of the tremendous power of tide reactions caused by the gravitational influence of the moon, while naturally discounting the idea that "lunar emanations" affect persons, plants or animals on the Earth.

Nevertheless there are some peculiar effects, some defying scientific explanation, which concern the relationship between the phases of the moon and things and people. First, it has been quite well determined that people go through cyclical emotional periods, periods of well-being and periods of depression, which coincide closely with the waxing and waning of the lunar

cycle! That this may be coincidence is of course possible; yet the correlation is so close that some medical men have wondered about it for a long time.

A second case in point is the discovery that moonlight seems to affect the insect world. British entomologists bent on trapping varieties of insects found that they caught five times as many during new-moon week as during full-moon week! This probably means that the insects were flying at varying altitudes. A rational explanation would conclude, of course, that the creatures are merely sensitive to light intensities, and only a controlled experiment would determine the truth of this guess.

While scientists, of course, completely disagree with the idea of "moon-madness" (the "fiend" gazing up at the full moon and slowly changing into a vampire or a werewolf), they are forced to admit that there is some subtle relationship between the waxing and waning of our satellite and events here on Earth. The data are there but the explanations are lacking!

By L. A. Burt

SENSATIONS IN REVERSE

SCIENTIFIC MYSTERIES exist on all levels. There are a hundred thousand unexplained problems which continually disturb scientists, and probably no field is more replete with them than natural science or biology. Of course that is because these sciences are least mapped with scientific "laws", rich though they may be in empirical data.

Consider, for example, this amazing problem. Frequently, tropical fish—that is, fish from tropical waters (not the household variety)—which are ordinarily quite edible, become poisonous for no apparent reason. Island peoples accustomed to these fish as a regular part of their diet will one day suddenly eat them and become ill. What causes the fish to become poisonous is not known.

The illnesses induced by eating these fish frequently take fantastic forms completely unrelated to any of the familiar effects of known poisons. The most startling illness induced by eating the poisoned fish is called, for want of a better name, "paradoxical sensory disturbance." This elaborate name implies simply that the sick person has a reversal of a given sensory impression. Thus he may take a drink

of hot water and think and feel that it is cold! Or the reverse may take place.

Scientists know too little about how sensory impressions are delivered as such to the brain, but it would seem that here there is literally an inversion of the process, whatever it may be. Sensory impressions are not always reliable, as experiments have shown. The familiar trick of biology students who wear glasses which make them see upside down and thus try to step over transoms, thinking them thresholds, is of this same order, for after a time the nervous system makes some sort of adjustment and the brain no longer sees an inverted image. Instead, in some obscure fashion, it twists the image around once more and the students have normal vision!

A phenomenon such as this is inexplicable. Similar odd sensory effects are commonplace in the literature of medicine and their explanations are as rare as their records are abundant. Most scientists doubt that the basic mystery of life will ever be unraveled, but they intend to learn a lot more about the way the nervous system and the brain work—even if they can't get around to manufacturing androids or synthetic men!



What can a mother do when a child insists on giving her every worldly—and unworldly—thing?

Strange Blood

By Paul W. Fairman

Diamonds, furs, Paris gowns: Donald gave them to his mother from out of thin air. Then one day Fate presented the bill...

THE FIRST shattering incident occurred when Donald was five years old. There was nothing strange about the setting. A lazy summer afternoon—Richard Laurel busy in his study above the screened porch where Greta was giving tea to Madge Benton, the most beautiful little gossip any college town ever had.

Madge Benton, armed with the financial resources of John Benton's real estate business, could dress as well as her taste dictated, and she had excellent taste. On this afternoon, she wore a stunning, gold-flecked sport frock that seemed even to attract the honey bees crawling up and down the screen on the outside.

But such a chatterbox, Madge. "He's the strangest man, really, my dear. He has the East Indian look, of course, but I can't help thinking that turban is an affectation."

Greta's hand trembled as she refilled Madge's cup. Also, her teeth caught at her lower lip; but Madge, full of her own words, did not notice this—nor the pain in Greta's eyes.

Madge's prattle went on: "And why does he continue to hang around Ludington College all these years? Think of it, darling—six years taking this course and that course. Why doesn't he go about his business—back to India or wherever it is he came from?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Greta replied weakly.

"Well, I'll tell you why. He still hopes to be accepted. He wants to be one of us, Greta, so he hangs on and walks the campus and ogles the girls with those black eyes of his. Honestly, Gret, my flesh crawls whenever he passes me. That simpering smile! And those eyes practically undress

one."

Greta made a quick motion. Madge caught it. She turned swiftly.

"Oh, hello, Donald."

The boy was five and it occurred to Madge Benton that she had never seen him smile. An odd child, really. But perfectly behaved. You couldn't get around that.

Donald Laurel came forward from the doorway where he had been standing. He walked to his mother's chair. He put an arm over her shoulders and said, "I love you very much, Greta."

Madge Benton said, "Now isn't that sweet! There aren't very many little boys who tell their mothers that without being asked."

But there was something strange about the child—very strange. That large-eyed solemnity. Madge's smile slipped away but she got it back and said, "Do you like my dress, Donald?"

His eyes had hardly been off the smart sport creation since he'd entered the room. "Yes," he said quietly. "I like lovely things. Your dress is pretty—pretty."

He stepped across and laid a gentle hand on Madge's upper arm, stroked it as though delighting in the soft touch of the fabric.

Greta stirred uneasily. "Hadn't you better go and play now, Donald? Take a cookie and run along."

Madge Benton sprang to her feet. "Gret," she bubbled. "Don't send the boy away. I've got to run, really. We're playing bridge tonight and I have to get my hair done."

She patted Donald's head. "Now you be a good boy, Donald, and I'll bring you something pretty when I come again."

"That would be very nice."

Greta was on her feet, but Madge waved her back. "Oh, you don't have

to show me to the door. I'm not company."

WITH THAT she was gone in a flounce of golden skirts. Madge stood perfectly still until she heard the front gate click. Then she dropped back into her chair. She was trembling slightly and her thoughts were thick and heavy with the renewal of the six-year-old question she'd always hurled against the bulwark she had built up in her mind.

Had it been only a dream or had it been reality?

Donald's voice broke in: "Will you sit here for a few minutes, Greta? Sit here and not go away? I have something for you."

"Why, of course, darling. You run and get it."

With complete solemnity and without haste, Donald left the porch. At the door he turned to look again at Greta. "I love you very much," he said.

"I love you too, darling."

Greta leaned back in her chair thinking again of Madge's chatter. Why had it all been brought back? Why did Madge have to mention him? After all the months and years of getting the thing out of her mind, and then—

There had been another summer morning, six years before, just after dawn in the back bedroom off the garden where Richard had brought her on their wedding night. Three months had passed and it was now a Sunday morning with Richard gone off for some early fishing.

Greta lying there in bed, eyes closed, luxurious and warm in a half doze. The nicest part of living—that half-conscious world in which one lingers just before complete wakefulness.

The hand over her mouth—a hand

out of nowhere! The hot breath. The turning. The violence!

The blessed unconsciousness.

The waking panic with the room empty, but the evidence, sheets twisted and pulled as in stark reality—

—or as in a nightmare!

The moaning and the pain. What did one do? Run screaming? —in through an open window—driven by lust—away like a lean satisfied cat—*what did one do?*

Cruel interrogation? "Mrs. Laurel—we don't wish to embarrass you, but we must know—the extent—of the damage."

Examination! Hands not belonging to Richard.

The awful public spotlight? The juicy bit? *He came in the window while she was sleeping. The poor dear. We mustn't let on when we meet her.*

Richard's stricken face!

No. No. No. What does one do?

A nightmare. Only a nightmare. Of course. A bad dream brought on by the stark new things of marriage. That was all. So simple. She'd seen him in the street wearing that turban. A mental image. A dream.

But keep it that way—keep it that way. A dream.

Through the weeks, months, years. A dream. But now, far enough away to ask and really wonder. A dream? A nightmare?

Donald was back. Snapping Greta erect. Bringing her into the present.

He was carrying a dress. A golden sport creation to excite the honey bees. He carried it reverently over his arm. He held it forth, almost smiling, not quite.

Greta stared. Sudden wild thoughts came to her mind. Panicky—tragicomic. Madge fleeing down the street in her underthings—Madge crouching behind a bush without her dress.

"Donald! What in heaven's name!"

"I want you to have it, Greta. It's very pretty and I love you."

"But, Donald! Where did you get it? How?"

A blankness came into his face. "Why—why, I made it. It's lovely. I wanted you to have it, so I made it."

Greta snatched the dress—held it out by the shoulders. Not Madge's dress. Madge, a petite five-foot-three. Not her dress. A larger one—perfect for Greta's large-boned five-seven. Greta sank weakly into a chair.

"Donald. This is serious. Tell me. *Where did you get this dress?*"

He laid a gentle hand on her head. "Dear Greta—I'm sorry. I've upset you. I didn't mean to. I just want you to have pretty things."

"Tell me where you got it!"

The child pondered. "I thought—and it was on the table."

"Then someone brought it?"

"No. It wasn't there before. I made it."

"Great God in heaven!"

"I've upset you."

"No, darling, no. Go and play now—please."

THERE wouldn't be a copy in the window, of course. Madge didn't buy dresses you found in windows or on the backs of other women. But this was the place. Greta entered the lush interior of Searchman's and found words hard come by when the salesgirl approached her.

"My—my little boy. I thought he might have come in here?"

"You are looking for a child, madame?"

"Yes. My little boy."

"No children have been here."

"Within the last hour?"

"No, madame."

Greta went around back and up the alley. She skirted two delivery trucks and found the rear entrance of Search-

man's. It was a steel door flush with the bricks. It opened from the inside. No small boy could have gotten in. Greta returned home.

"You were downtown, Greta?"

"Yes, Donald. Was I gone long?"

There was hurt in the eyes. "You should have taken me."

"I'm sorry, darling. Next time."

"I love you. I like to be with you."

Greta sat down on the lounge and drew her son close. "Donald, look at me."

The child obeyed, turning his face to hers. Greta stared. Her reaction up to this moment had been one of reality; of fact; a reaction based on a normal, recognized world. But staring into the child's dark, fathomless eyes, she could find a new basis for reaction: a strange, unknown world. But unreal? What is a dream and what is not? Could anyone draw the line—this is the real—this the unreal?

No.

Rather—this is the known—this the unknown.

In Donald's eyes, the sturdiness of new vistas.

A strange thrill ran through Greta. "Come, darling. I'm sorry I left you. We'll go window-shopping."

"**A**REN'T they beautiful, Donald?"

The shoes were beautiful. Alligators in Williams' window with no price tags in evidence. Williams' lowest price was eighteen dollars.

"Pretty—pretty." Donald pointed to a pair of white pumps. "Those too."

Greta glanced pointedly down at her own low-heeled blacks. She sighed. "Let's go home, Donald. We've window-shopped enough."

Donald looked up at her. "You like lovely things, too, don't you?"

"Yes, darling."

Donald brought his mother the white pumps ten minutes after they

got home. She was in the kitchen working with supper. He laid the shoes on the table before her. "I want you to have them because I love you so much,"

Greta fell to her knees and took the boy in her arms. He did not respond to her emotion, but he seemed pleased. He stroked her hair and she felt herself in the presence of age—kindly age bathed in gentle spirit. But, somehow, he was of her no longer. In brief hours he had gone beyond her understanding.

But there was pride.

"My son! My son!"

"**A**M I disturbing you, Richard?"

He looked up from the paper he was doing on ancient Aztec culture. "Of course not, my dear."

"I wanted to get one of your books. Don't you have something on India? Some religion—*yogā*, I believe they call it."

"You'll find a couple of volumes on the top shelf—there at the far end."

Greta took down the books, glanced at the titles. She could pronounce neither of them.

"Why the interest in Indian religions, my dear?" If there was other than curiosity in her husband's voice, Greta failed to notice it.

"I've been meaning to look into *yoga* for quite some time. A fascinating thing, don't you think? All about men who can walk through walls—"

"As something of casual interest—yes." Richard was speaking carefully.

Greta snapped a book shut. "What do you think of *yoga* really, Richard? Is there anything to it?"

He considered carefully before answering. "It all depends. As I said before—from casual interest—"

"It's about the mind being all-powerful, isn't it?"

"Something of the sort. I never

went into it very deeply. I think it could be dangerous—"

"Dangerous?"

"Yoga is a pretty deep proposition."

Greta laughed. "But more exciting possibly than a detective story on a hot summer afternoon."

"Very probably."

Greta kissed him and left the study.

SHE READ both books through from cover to cover. Most of it she did not pretend to understand. She skipped the long words and the obtuse passages but certain quotations flamed in her mind:

The human brain cannot be approached entirely from the standpoint and attitude of the medical man. Here the spiritual searcher moves beyond realms of the flesh and finds vaster frontiers.

It cannot be denied—authoritatively, that is—that the average human uses only ten percent of his mental power.

And a more exalted passage:

The human brain is beyond conception in its power. When used to its capacity, there are no wonders it cannot perform. It is an unending spiral toward the infinite. The mind conceives a small thing, and it is within the mind's power to create or accomplish that thing. Then, from the accomplishment, comes wider conceptions, greater power to accomplish. The secret is work—discipline—complete objectivity. The reward, an ever greatening unfoldment toward the infinite.

Greta pondered deeply. The secret was work. That also was the secret of great accomplishment in anything—on the violin, for instance. But once in a while a child was born with the talent to pick up a violin and—play.

The thrill was swelling in her heart. The possibilities. She thrilled as could

any wife of an obscure college professor on poor pay.

"IT'S A beautiful fur coat, isn't it, Donald? The one in the middle. Mink is one of the most expensive furs in the world."

Donald stared at the coat with all the seriousness of a judge about to pass sentence. "Pretty—pretty," he murmured. "Do you really think mink is the loveliest fur there is?"

"Yes, darling. And it's very warm on cold winter days."

They arrived home at about three o'clock that day and Donald became occupied with some sand models he was constructing in the back yard. It wasn't until after supper, with Richard back in his study, that Greta again spoke of the coat.

"Are you going to—make me one, Donald?"

The child stared soberly at the dish he was wiping. "I can't make up my mind, Greta. I love you a great deal and I wouldn't want to do you an injustice."

Greta felt quick fear. "I don't understand, darling."

"The mink was lovely, of course. But that other coat in the window. The Russian sable, I believe it was marked. I thought it very beautiful."

Greta laughed. "So did I, Donald. I'll tell you a secret. I liked it better than the mink."

His eyes were large. "You did? I'm very glad of that. You see it's a little difficult when we don't agree on what's nicest. The making is much harder. I can make what I like much easier, so if you like it too—"

Greta knelt down and put her arms around Donald. "Darling—can I be with you this time? Can I—watch you make it?"

He regarded her for some time as though mulling over a knotty problem.

He finished with his dish and laid it carefully on the sink.

"I don't see why not. I love you very much. I like to have you with me."

Greta kissed him swiftly and, while he didn't get at all excited, it seemed to please him. He solemnly stroked her cheek. "We'll finish the dishes, Greta. Then I'll make you a coat."

Reality—unreality, Greta thought warmly. There was no line drawn between them. It was merely a matter of knowledge.

....It is within the mind's power to create....

"I'll finish the dishes dear. You rest. Lie down on the lounge. I'll come in when I'm finished."

"If you wish me to," Donald said. He quietly left the kitchen.

TEN minutes later when Greta entered the living room, the child was seated primly on the lounge. He said, "I'm sorry, Greta. I promised you but it came so quickly. The image was so perfect. He pointed to the shimmering Russian sable on the lounge beside him.

Greta caught her breath. "Oh my darling! It's—it's priceless!"

"It's very beautiful."

Greta ran her fingers through the rich fur. The fierce heat of possession was upon her. She took Donald's hand and they went upstairs.

They talked for a while in Donald's room and then Greta put him to bed. He lay watching her with that unblinking solemnity before she left him. As she closed the door a quick, chilling thought assailed her. A realization.

Not since his earliest babyhood had she ever seen Donald asleep! Strange this had never occurred to her before. But he'd been such a good baby—such a good child. Always into bed without protest. But always the great liq-

uid eyes upon her—at night when she left him—in the morning when she came for him; always lying so quietly, wide-eyed, waiting for her.

Greta went into her bedroom and sat with the coat over her knees. Distress now, at realizing how futile it was. A Russian sable for Richard's wife? Impossible. Explain to Richard? Her every instinct cried out against it. Richard wouldn't understand—couldn't understand. His precise, orthodox mind would reel. Richard was not mentally equipped to receive such a stunning truth from the unknown.

But could she deceive him? Fur coats—new dresses. He was singularly unobserving. But—

Greta hid the coat far back in her closet, feeling a vague resentment as she did so. A resentment mainly toward herself rather than Richard. She lay awake for a long time, thinking, while the house was still and Richard breathed evenly beside her. There was a way. There had to be a way. Of course.

Money.

A FEW days later she stopped at the bank with Donald. The First Trust. Very modern. Electric eyes to open the outer door before you reached it. This should please Donald.

But Donald knew exactly where the electric eye was located. He explained it to his mother. "Your body breaks the beam causing—"

"Yes, darling." For the first time, Greta felt a twinge of fear. "Isn't it nice in here? All the modern furniture?"

Donald looked about solemnly. "I don't like it. It's cold. It doesn't have the warmth of real beauty."

Greta got two brand-new ten dollar bills. On the way home she was filled with heady anticipation.

She showed them to him in the

living room that night after supper. Laid them on the lounge side by side. "Aren't they pretty, darling? With enough of these we can have all the things we want. Do you think you could make some of these for mother?"

Donald picked up one of the bills. He examined it curiously. Laid it down. "It's only paper. No, I don't think it's very pretty, Greta. Only paper."

"But Donald!"

"Do you think it's pretty?"

"Yes, Donald. Very pretty."

The child sat primly, with his hands folded, looking at her.

"We could have many things, dear. Many pretty things." There was a thickness in her voice and throat from the frustration, the annoyance of his senseless objections.

He shook his head slowly, unhappily.

"Donald! Don't be so stubborn!"

He raised his eyes to hers. It was as though she'd struck him. His lip trembled. "I'll make pretty things for you, Greta. All of them you want. But this—this isn't—"

Greta took him fiercely in her arms. "I'm sorry, darling. Very sorry. Mother is tired. You forgive me, don't you?"

"That isn't necessary. I love you very much."

Greta put the bills back into her purse. She put Donald to bed and then paced the living-room floor. There had to be a way!

There was.

LORBER Brothers catered to the elite. They had a branch on Third Street. Not nearly so large as their big store in the city, but their stock was exquisite.

Greta waited three days until Richard had his meeting with the faculty in Deem's hall far across the campus.

Then she put on the sable coat and took Donald down to Lorber Brothers.

The coat generated great respect. She looked at diamond necklaces while Donald stood soberly watching.

"Isn't this one beautiful, darling?"

The child agreed. "Pretty—pretty."

Greta left when the clerk grew impatient....

MADGE BENTON had shining little predatory teeth that seemed to chew at the hard-rubber of the telephone transmitter. "—walking into Lorber's as big as you please with Donald. Honestly, my dear, I almost fainted. That coat! Russian sable no less, my dear... Of course it was Greta! Don't you think I know an old friend when I see her?... No. I didn't stop. I went right on. I'd have been no end embarrassed facing her. What?... Don't make me laugh! At least fifteen thousand dollars, if I know furs. And on Richard's salary? Don't be naive, darling!"

"DONALD, you were going to let me watch you make the coat, remember? I'd like very much to watch this time. It must be wonderful."

Donald considered. He shook his head. "Not really. There's very little to it. So very simple."

"You'll make me a necklace? And let me watch?"

"Yes, Greta." He laid a gentle hand on her arm. "I love you very much. I like to give you pretty things."

They went to Donald's room. Richard had gotten him a small table and chair, a little blue table. He sat in the chair with his hands folded on the table for all the world like a tot in kindergarten trying to please the teacher with perfect posture. Greta sat on the edge of his bed, every muscle tense to the point of aching.

Donald closed his eyes and appeared to be praying. He sat for two or three minutes and Greta decided that rather than prayer it was more like a nap. Perfectly composed; entirely calm.

Five minutes and tiny drops of perspiration appeared on Donald's forehead. He opened his eyes. He seemed afraid of offending Greta. "I'm sorry. Nothing happens. Maybe I have to be alone. I don't know why I should have to be alone but maybe that's the way it is."

Tiny tendrils of fear passed up Greta's spine. "All right, darling. I'll wait in my room."

She waited ten minutes before Donald came in and handed her a diamond necklace. He looked tired, drawn, but he brightened when he saw how pleased she was.

Greta, concerned with his exceptional weariness, felt justified in hurrying him to bed as soon as possible. She kissed him goodnight and tiptoed out, turning in the doorway to see the glow of the small nightlight in his eyes.

She hurried to her own room and sat breathless, staring at the necklace. There were nineteen matched stones in the piece and Greta heard herself whispering, "Thousands—thousands—and only the beginning." She suddenly lay back across the bed, weak from the impact of sudden wealth. She allowed the hard brilliance of the gems to lie cold across her face, thrilling to their touch.

TWO DAYS later, Greta went to the city, ostensibly for some shopping. "It will be a very quick trip, darling, and I'm afraid it would tire you. So you wait until next time. Next week we'll go to the city together. We'll go to the zoo and see all the animals. Will you like that?"

There was hurt in Donald's expres-

sion but he hid it well. "That will be very nice. I like to be with you wherever you are."

She knelt and hugged him impetuously. "And you will be with me, darling. Always."

Greta had already taken the necklace apart. She carried with her its largest stones, having hidden the rest in a flower garden behind the house.

Also, she carried in her bag a notation of the city's three largest jewelry establishments. Of the three, she finally selected one and sailed in with her head held high.

"I would like an appraisal on some diamonds."

The young man wore a very high collar and an air of sincere politeness. "We will be most happy to serve you, madame."

Greta poured the diamonds on a velvet pad expecting a reaction of surprise. This reaction was not forthcoming. The young man picked up one of the stones delicately and held it to an eye piece.

Greta felt a sudden wave of fear. The questions. She swiftly decided to forestall them. "These are a part of a necklace my great-grandmother owned. It was passed down to me. It was broken some time ago and the diamonds have lain in my bank vault for a long time. Now I am in need of some cash."

The young man had no comment. He inspected a few more of the stones and then laid the eye piece on the velvet pad. "I would like to call our Mr. Saunders. He would have the last word in matters such as this."

Greta waited, suddenly glad she was seated as her knees had become weak. The young man went silently away and Greta took herself fiercely in hand.

Why should she tremble? She had stolen nothing. She was no thief and

there was no necessity of feeling or acting like one. But the enormity of the whole affair smote her. She closed her eyes tightly and the room spun around her. Suppose they were no good. Suppose this were all a huge hoax of some kind!

But the warmth of Russian sable was there to steady and to reassure. She opened her eyes and stroked the fur. The thrill, the heady triumph, came back.

MR. SAUNDERS was older and not quite so sincerely polite. Possibly a trifle more businesslike. He introduced himself—rather pointedly, Greta thought, and waited.

New panic swept her. This had not come into her mind during the planning. A name. Identification! There had to be a name! A false one?

"Mrs. Richard Laurel," she said rather coldly. "Charing Lane, Wingstead. My husband is a professor at Wingstead College."

"And you wish to sell these diamonds?"

In Mr. Saunders words, Greta read a hidden meaning: *Your husband also wishes to sell these diamonds?*

He didn't say that! He didn't say that, Greta told herself fiercely. "Yes. If the cash value is high enough. It is not a distress sale, however."

Mr. Saunders smiled bleakly. "That would make no difference, Mrs. Laurel. We would insist on paying a fair price under any conditions."

"That's very good of you."

"You'll pardon me while I appraise the gems?"

"Certainly." Greta got up and walked to a counter filled tastefully with watches, each in a velvet box. She stared at them, but unseeing. She turned almost with guilt to see Mr. Saunders hunched over the velvet pad. Greta forced herself to count to a

hundred before she strolled casually back and sat down.

Mr. Saunders straightened and began adding figures on a pad of paper. "I would take responsibility for making a blanket offer of thirty-nine thousand dollars, madame."

Greta caught her breath, then forced a calm face. "So little?"

Saunders shrugged. "After all—they are loose stones. If madame would care to have an independent appraisal made—"

"That won't be necessary."

"Madame would want the check certified?"

Madame wanted no check of any kind. She wanted cash. But asking for so large an amount in green money was out of the question.

"No. Your regular check will be perfectly all right."

Greta left the store with a burning face. Then, furious with herself, her lips firmed. Why did she feel for all the world like a thief?

During the ride home on the suburban, she kept the check clutched tightly in her hand. She watched the green hills rush by. She strove to make a decision. The miles unrolled and when the train pulled into the vine-covered Wingstead station, the decision had been made.

She would have to tell Richard.

Regardless of how much she dreaded the task, it had to be done. After all, there was proof. Faced with what she could lay before him, he would have to believe her. But how would he react even with the believing? Somehow, she could not conceive of her husband as having stature enough to remain upright under such shattering truth.

Or take advantage of it.

She walked the five blocks home, making final plans. She would tell him tonight. After Donald was in bed and

everything was quiet. After she'd rested a while from the exertions of the day.

Donald waited for her on the porch. He smiled gently and took her hand. "I love you very much, Greta. I have been waiting for you."

"I hurried home, darling. I'll change and get supper. There will be just the two of us tonight."

"No. Father is home."

GRETA FELT a chill. She glanced at the coat over her arm. It had been a warm walk. Too warm for Russian sable. "You wait here, Donald. I'll put my things away and be right down."

She tiptoed past the closed door of Richard's study. Into her room. Richard was standing by the bed.

"Where did you get that expensive coat, Greta?"

He looked frail and old. His face was gray and seemed strangely lifeless.

"Richard, you frightened me."

"Where did you get the coat?" he held out a hand and poured a small pile of diamonds on the bed. "And these. I saw you bury them last night. 'Who is the man, Greta?'"

Possibly, with the stage properly set, she could have told him—made him believe. Now—

"Who is the man?"

Greta laughed—laughter charged with hysteria. "Richard! Don't be ridiculous!"

"Does a husband make himself ridiculous by inquiring where his wife gets expensive gifts?"

Greta passed a hand over her tired brow. "Not now—please not now. There is an explanation—not at all what you think. But give me a little time." She sank down on the bed.

There was no anger in his voice. Only bitterness. "I've known so much for so long, but I never asked because I didn't want to be told." Richard was

sitting down now, his eyes closed—talking into darkness. "The rumors—the whispered words over the years. Like a coward I ignored them because I was afraid of the truth. But I have eyes. I can see. I can see a son who does not look like me—who looks like a child out of India. And it's indeed strange how so many people know so much about something they should have no way of knowing."

"Richard, please."

She could have as well remained silent. It was as though he hadn't heard her. "Like a child from India with strange blood, and all these years I've closed my ears. Now—now I've been forced. I must speak and demand. It has become too flagrant—too open to accept."

"Please, Richard."

Then it was as though another woman spoke through her; as though all the fears and the weariness and the hot hopes had been built into another woman using her lips. She was a fishwife, screaming.

"—and no money! Never any money! Only a doddering college town with gossips and small-minded people until I was ready to go mad!"

There was much more with Richard not seeming to hear. Then Donald was standing in the doorway, his dark eyes upon her—his face expressionless. Richard got up stiffly and walked out of the room. A moment later his study door closed.

Richard Laurel did it with a gun he kept in his drawer. Quite accurately through the left temple, and there was scarcely any blood. Greta found him lying forward over his desk. There was no note. Greta fainted.

AFTER THE first shock, she was surprised at her own strength—at the composure with which she was able to take it. Poor, futile, frustrated Richard. Possibly it was the best of

all endings for him. He'd taken the proud man's way. Poor, bewildered, mistaken Richard.

Greta found her chief worry to be Donald. How would he react? He had never before seen death. It would be a shock. Could it possibly shatter his priceless gift? Greta trembled at the thought.

She kept him away—out of direct contact as much as possible. Only at the funeral did he walk close and actually see his father in the coffin. And then Greta whisked him away as soon as possible.

They rode back from the cemetery, Greta's mind full of taking up the loose ends and leaving Wingstead forever. She frankly admitted it would be a relief.

MADGE BENTON'S predatory little teeth gnashed at the telephone transmitter. "Oh, my dear—

really! You have no idea of the shock. And so soon after Richard's suicide... Yes, I was the one who found her and they're still trying to figure it out. The people who take care of that sort of thing aren't talking—they're just plain bewildered. They've questioned the child, but after all he's only five years old—what can they expect? I have a feeling the truth will never be known... Yes, his name is Donald—and I tell you, Grace, there's something strange about that child—I'll never forget it—never—

"—walking into that room—walking in and seeing that coffin standing in the middle of the living room—Greta lying in it—her still white face.

"—and that dreadful child standing beside it, stroking the gray silk lining—saying 'pretty—pretty—pretty'—over and over again."

THE END

BEYOND OUR REACH?

IN science-fiction we've given such free rein to our imaginations that we sometimes ignore the line between fantasy and extrapolated science. This is good entertainment, of course, but bad science. A few writers limit themselves to flitting around the Solar System, but most take *inter- and intra-galactic* travel in their stride. Of all the dreams of Mankind, this particular one, along with the concept of time-travel, seems remotest. For we run into that damnable barrier, that rock-ribbed rule of science which seems inviolable—nothing material can exceed the velocity of light!

Let's examine the picture. Even if we could travel with the velocity of light, the galaxies would be beyond our reach since their distances are often measured in millions and tens of millions of light years. Assuming that we could travel with light's speed we would be restricted to only the relatively near stars, unless we make our ship a miniature self-contained planet in whose hulk generations would be born and die before the goal was reached.

Knowing how strongly the light-velocity barrier seems to permeate physical theory and experiment, it seems quite likely that we will never be able to leave our Solar

System even if we do attain interplanetary travel with chemical and atomic rockets, save for perhaps life-time trips to the very nearest stars, starting with Alpha Centauri, whose distance from Earth is *merely* four light-years. Thus it appears that the galaxies and stellar clouds will forever remain dots on photographic plates, or little specks in the heavens.

It is not inconceivable, of course, that some destructive concept might render this judgment premature. Perhaps scientific research will disclose some way to change this apparently immutable law. S-F writers have suggested some ingenious techniques, the most logical being the "mass-neutralizer" and the "inertia-destroyer", which reduces the mass of an object to zero, thus removing the bugaboo of the "material thing". The very fact that we can conceive of this rather strange concept is encouraging.

So, while we may believe pretty strongly now that interstellar and inter-galactic wandering are impossible and will be impossible forever, there is the slight logical wedge of "maybe..." Let's hope that this wedge will be driven deeply and that some glorious day Man will be able to reach the stars!



THE CLUB HOUSE

By Reg Phillips

THE MID-SEPTEMBER issue of the newszine *FANTASY-TIMES* is its tenth anniversary issue. James Taurasi has published one hundred and thirty-eight issues in that time. And he has brought you the news before it happened in a lot of cases. A stationary engineer for a big powerplant in private life, he has made his zine his full-time hobby.

In this anniversary issue he has brought together articles by outstanding names in the fan and pro fields with two purposes in mind. One is to discuss the progress in science and science fiction in the past ten years, and the other is to discuss trends or possible developments during the coming ten years.

Damon Knight and Bill Hamling both give their ideas on the development of stf during the coming ten years. Jerome Bixby discusses just about the same things from a different angle, coming up with a definition of what stf is, by Ted Sturgeon. Sturgeon says, "It's a story about human beings, with human problems that are solved in terms of human relations, in a setting which could not occur except for the science angle."

That definition is very much like the definition of the broader field of fantasy that Howard Browne told me a couple of years ago. He said, "Fantasy is a story about ordinary people who would ordinarily go their ordinary ways with nothing worth a story happening to them. One fantasy element is injected into their perfectly

ordinary lives. What it does to them, how they meet the problems it poses, and how they finally solve those problems, is the story." It's as simple as that, and it must be kept that simple. Since science fiction is a branch of fantasy, the same holds for it too.

That "injection of one fantasy element" is an intriguing idea. In fact, it's the gateway to more than fantasy fiction. It's the door to progress in real life, and in science itself. Tom Gardner discusses that theme in his article in this anniversary issue of *F-T* by reviewing things that have been landmarks in human progress, and then guessing at three things which he thinks would have the greatest effect on the future of mankind if they became reality. His three choices are first the development of space travel, second the development of so-called giant brains or electronic calculators, and third the prolongation of life by at least doubling the life expectancy.

Taurasi then announces a contest. The contestants must submit to *FANTASY-TIMES* 1,000 words or less on "What three things would influence Man the most if developed during the next hundred years." First prize will be a year's subscription to *F-T*. Second and third winners will get a six-months' subscription. The three winners will get their articles printed in *F-T*. The address is 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, New York. When you read this the contest will be over since its deadline is October 30. But you can get the results and also all the

news of interest to stf fans by subscribing to *F-T* if you don't get it already.

But to get back to the main theme of this editorial, progress and history is made by the injection of fantasy elements into everyday human affairs. Take the atom bomb. Its explosion in Japan was a dual one. Material and mental. Its explosion into the consciousness of the world was far more powerful than its actual explosion. It was a fantasy element injected into history. There are those who think that if it weren't for the atom bomb, Russia would now be master of the world, or World War III would already be in progress on a global scale. The fact remains that the Bomb is THE fantasy element in current history, and will no doubt remain so until such time as its use in warfare is so common that it becomes a standard tool of war. That is, until mankind has met the problems posed by the fantasy element and solved them, ending the fantasy in one way or another in a way that satisfies God's editorial requirements.

But the atom bomb is only one fantasy element that has been injected into human life. There have been more than you can count. Some were spectacular. Some slipped in so subtly only later historians could see their significance. Dynamite was originally supposed to make war too terrible. Now, it's used to clear stumps off the pasture. Poison gas was supposed to be the weapon that would conquer the world for the Kaiser in World War I. It's outlawed today for two very practical reasons. One, its only value is in surprise. Two, retaliation cancels out its advantage.

Out of all the fantasy elements that became real and injected themselves into human progress, what are the

three that had the greatest influence? Were they, like the atom bomb, the learning of how to utilize some great natural force? Were they perhaps the internal combustion engine, fire, and the wheel?

Strangely enough, they weren't. All of those things were merely logical developments, inevitable developments from the three most basic fantasy elements. And those most basic fantasy elements had to do with reality only indirectly. They weren't natural laws. By themselves they take no part in any machine or device or product you can buy.

The first lifted man above the animal. The second had to be injected before the utilization of fire or the creation of the stone knife. The third was injected into history as a growing force less than half a century ago. They are recognized and have names. What are they?

The first is the symbol. The substitution of something for something. A grunt as the symbol for the emotion of pleasure so that the listener knows you are pleased, the memory of the grunt as being uttered by you which makes me able to recall you were pleased. It made language possible, and then written language, and finally formal logic and mathematics.

The second is the experimental method. It had to flower in the mind of the first scientist before he could create the first super weapon, the stone tied to the end of a stick by thongs.

The third? Standardization. The thing that created widely used alphabets, that lifted the experimental method to a precise technique. But more important than those, the thing makes every part in anything you buy today exactly the same in every respect as its corresponding part in all identical devices, and exactly the same as that

replacement part stocked in the repair shop.

From those three elements, the symbol, the experimental method, and standardization, flows all else, and all that mankind will ever develop.

Utterly simple. So simple you may never have thought of them before as being important. Yet without the first the story of man would always be the story of the great apes, without the second it would be forever the story of the dark ages of early history, and without the third it would be forever the story of ancient Rome.

Breathtaking, this fantasy unfolding of the history of man, isn't it?

* * *

Breathtaking too is the tremendous energy of fandom that produces so many fanzines every month. They are an outgrowth of a simple fantasy element, the mimeograph machine. Coupled with a typewriter it makes a complete home publishing company within the financial reach of anyone who wants to own it badly enough. And plenty do, so let's get on with the reviews for this month. But first there are a few letters:

One from Edward Wood, 31 N. Aberdeen St., Chicago 7, Ill., who, if you recall, contends that there should be fewer fanzines and those few should be better. It's a rebuttal of his first letter, and accurately states our difference in viewpoint in, "You look only (or mainly) at the entertainment side, while I think science fiction to be much more than that." But then he goes on to say, "I'm tired of having all kinds of magazines from *LIFE*, *NEW YORKER*, down to little literary ones heap scorn and abuse upon stf readers without the smallest trace of impartiality." I'm not. I think it's good advertising. But even if it

weren't, Mr. Wood's suggested remedy won't work. He suggests that, "For stf readers to counteract this false and vicious impression, they must like Caesar's wife be above reproach. Let fandom clean house so that the publicity hucksters will find no black sheep by which to judge all of us." It just occurred to me, maybe he's pulling my leg. Some of these fans have a veddy deep sense of humah. Yesss... Have to watch out for them.

Whew! That's a relief. I just opened the next letter very cautiously and found it to be a perfectly innocent request from Jon Borgzinner, 975 Park Ave., New York 28, N. Y., secretary of the American Astronautical Club, for me to mention the existence of his club. It's a new club, and very interested in getting members all over the country and overseas. He doesn't say much about his club, so you'll have to write him for details.

A letter from Rog Nelson of 3522 Union, San Diego, Calif., states that his group is having the Westercon No. 5 on June 21-22, 1952. That's a big event for West Coast fandom, judging from the past. And Walt Dunkelburger, 1443 Fourth Ave., So., Fargo, N. D., wants an assist in selling some Finlay Portfolios. They sell for a dollar, and each contain eight reproductions of Finlay's better pics suitable for framing. A nice touch for your den....

Okay, hold your hat and keep your seat, as they say when the roller coaster starts up. Here come the fanzine reviews!

* * *

QUANDRY: 15c; "at the Sign of the Purple Padded Cell"; Lee Hoffman, 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Ga. There's some rumor going around as to whether Lee is a guy or a gal. It was a gal who showed up at the Nolacon, but up to that time the other fans thought Lee was a guy.

This No. 14 issue is devoted mainly to her experiences at the Nolacon, heightened by illustrations by Bloch, Speer, Vick, Tucker, and Hoffman herself. Highly humorous. Fans she had corresponded with who had thought she was a he reacted with amazement, chagrin, embarrassment, and even delight. Bob Tucker's reaction was summed up in his brief statement, "I'll be damned." The cartoons satirizing the convention are absolutely priceless.

There's more coming up in future issues. If you want a wonderful fanzine, one you can chuckle over, this is it.

* * *

TLMA: published by and for the fastest-growing fan club there is, The Little Monsters of America. Membership is one dollar, which brings you a year's subscription to TLMA and lots of other stuff besides. Address, TLMA, 408 W. Bell St., Statesville, N. C.

There're excellent stories and articles in this zine, but by far the best part is the letter department where the Little Monsters strut their stuff. Utterly mad! Why don't you join? If you're the cautious type they'll probably send you a sample copy of their zine. I note in their list of members that I'm now an honorary monster. Monh-teur Feeleeps.

* * *

NEWS LETTER: 15c; bi-monthly, Bob Tucker, P.O. Box 260, Bloomington, Illinois. The most comprehensive report on the Nolacon I've seen is in this photo offset zine. And don't forget that the 1952 World Stf Convention is to be held in Chicago....

In "Reporter", reporting on fans and fandom, you get news about the fans themselves. Hundreds of brief items that can't be found anyplace else.

Of especial interest this issue is Tucker's discovery of a new fan artist, Richard Bergeron, R.F.D. No. 1, Newport, Vermont. He was discovered through the NFFF manuscript bureau.

News Letter's new format is a wonderful improvement. It can't be beat. And for you newcomers who don't know Bob, he's the Wilson Tucker whose books and pocket books you've read and enjoyed, as well as the stories he's had in *Amazing Stories*. Besides being one of today's best writers, he's a projectionist in a movie house, business agent for a union in Bloomington, and one of the friendliest guys I've ever known. You'll like him, and you'll like the way he reports the news.

* * *

OPERATION FANTAST: 75c per year for four quarterly copies; Capt. K.F. Slater, 13 Gp. R.P.C., B.A.O.R., 15, c/o

G.P.O., England, editor. U.S.A. representative, Philip J. Rasch, 567 Erskine Drive, Pacific Palisades, Calif.

There are two thought-provoking stories in this No. 9 issue and a capable and unbiased analysis of the state of the pro field of science fiction by Edward Wood under the title, "The Darkening Cloud." This fanzine is printed. Joyce and Ken Slater are active fans, and I do mean active. Besides the zine you get several news-letters about the doings of British and American fandom for your all-important six bits.

* * *

SAUCER REVIEW: a most unusual fanzine. A letter accompanies it which says, "The chief object of the magazine is to make contact with only stf readers who collect or can collect saucer newspaper clippings, and is not for sale or exchange for other fanzines." Elliott Rockmore, P.O. Box 48, Wall St. Station, New York 5, N. Y..

The zine itself consists largely of photo-stats of actual newspaper clippings about flying saucers and other sky phenomena. There are also maps and analyses coordinating the data in the clippings. This is a careful and intelligent study of this phenomenon. It may come up with some real discoveries about this modern mystery. Good luck, Elliott, and any of you readers who are interested in working with him on this.

I saw something myself not long ago. I was driving south of Los Angeles when I saw a streak of bluish fire that had a large fiery head. It lasted just a second or two and died out without reaching the horizon. Next day I read in the papers where some pilots over Mexico saw the same thing. Since they were a couple of hundred miles to the southeast of me, it must have been way up. It was undoubtedly a meteor. The unusual thing about it was the size of it. I would guess that the ball of fire that was its head must have been a hundred miles in diameter at least. It was as though a frozen ball of gasoline or other high combustible had plunged into the atmosphere and burned as it evaporated.

* * *

FAN-VET: free to overseas members of the armed forces and other members of the armed forces. Ray Van Houten, 127 Spring St., Paterson 3, N.J. The Fantasy Veterans Association has as its purpose the providing of men in the armed forces with science-fiction reading material, and the means for them to locate one another and get together. It's a worth-while work. You can help out by sending your old books and magazines to Ray, or sending him money to buy some, and paying the postage.

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DESTINY: 25c; 11848 S.E. Powell Blvd., Portland 66, Oregon. Same size and format as *Fanscient* used to be. Lee Ramsey, its publicity manager enclosed a card saying they need at least fifty new subscribers before they can afford their next issue. It's photo-offset, over thirty pages, with top-quality illustrations. Best feature this issue is a list of Lovecraft's amateur press works, which are poems, essays, and stories. A discussion of sports, 2,000 A.D., by Charles Stuart is quite interesting. "Who's Who in Stf" is continued from *Fanscient*, featuring this time the artist L. Sterne Stevens (Lawrence). The cover is by Hannes Bok.

Hope you get your subscribers, Lee.

• • •

ORB: 25c; Bob Johnson, Box 941, Greeley, Colorado. "Featuring the unusual in imaginative fiction." And most unusual is "A Fable of the Sholves" by Katherine Maclean and Charles Dye.

Orb is a work of art from every standpoint, printing, artwork, reproduction, editorship. When you get your copy you'll relax in a world of perfection in fantasy. In this issue of *Orb*, volume 2, number 3, I think Bob Johnson has topped everything ever published in fandom. I mean it.

• • •

STF TRADER: Box 3, Tyro, Kansas; 10c; Jack Irwin. As its name implies, it is a fanzine for those interested in selling, buying, or trading back issues of promags and books. Would you like to be a fantasy collector? In one issue of *STF TRADER* you can find advertised enough items to start a real collection! And if you want to sell those old magazines, well, the subscribers to *STF TRADER* are seriously devoted to the study of all phases of rocketry and space travel. It's been going five years now.

• • •

JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: no price listed; official organ of the Chicago Rocket Society, which holds regular meetings in Chicago. Address, 10630 S. St. Louis Ave., Chicago 43, Illinois. This group and its magazine are seriously devoted to the study of all phases of rocketry and space travel. It's been going five years now.

This issue for review, the September 1951 number, has a long article discussing the pros and cons of the Society's doing some actual experimenting. It's a nice idea. Maybe they could come up with something the government financed researches haven't thought of.

PEON: 15c; bi-monthly; Charles Lee Riddle, PNI, USN, Fleet All Weather Training Unit, Pacific, c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, Calif.. Gene Hunter assistant editor. All that complicated address means that *PEON* is published in Hawaii. A must in reading entertainment is "So You Want to be an Editor" by Anthony Boucher.

E. Hoffman Price writes "Thoughts While Strolling" and this time discusses fans' jeers at the cliches of pro writers. Reminds me of one of the best fan critics I ever knew. He could spot something phony in a story with infallible accuracy, as his reviews in his fanzine had proved over a long period. Then one day he sent me a story he had written for possible pro sale, asking me to criticize it. It showed how blind an otherwise clear sighted person can be about his own stuff. There was even a spaceship pilot listening to the approach of another spaceship!

• • •

EXPLORER: 10c; published by and for the International S-F Correspondence Club, the ISFCC. Ed Noble, Jr., Box 49, Girard, Penna.. Eleven new members are listed this issue. This club answers the needs and wants of a lot of fans, as evidenced by their huge membership. Want pen pals? You can get them in this group. The zine is full of news, letters, and other stuff by the members that make it more interesting than the same number of pages of poems and articles. Get a copy, and I'll bet you'll join the club.

• • •

MAD: 15c; Dick Ryan, 224 Broad St., Newark, Ohio. Vol. 1, No. 1. He and Dick Lippincott created this first issue all by themselves, and did a far better job than the average first issue. Twenty-two pages of good mimeography. "The Gleep Story", by R. Mark Rutledge, is about some creatures that came out of a door in the ground, in a dream, and the next day the guy found the door where he dreamed it. Not bad. The old argument over *SCIENCE* fiction or science *FICTION* is discussed with some good arguments.

They really go to work on their discussion of the current promags, rating stories and covers. And "Fan View" or what's new in fandom.

These boys should make a mark for themselves with their fanzine, given material and subscribers. How about giving them a boost with a subscription?

• • •

ASMODEUS: 15c; Alan H. Pesetsky, 1475 Townsend Ave., New York 52, N.Y.. Combined with *GARGOYLE*. No. 2, Fall 1951. Its editor says the issue is a bit late,

about a year late, in fact. Lots of entertaining reading, with the best being Bob Silverburg's future history of fandom. I read of my death in it with great interest. And fandom's mourning my untimely passing. (Did I hear Howard Browne murmur, "Any time is good enough!")

An article on "Religion & Science" by C. S. Blinderman has a lot of eight cylinder words that talk about the "two" approaches to reality from an enlightened viewpoint, coming up with something named "naturalized humanism" as a compromise substitute for the older religions. It's good reading because it has plenty of grounds for arguments and feuds. It takes no account of the value of human needs. In another field, by analogy, we could start with the premise that what everyone needs is an electric refrigerator.

Since the last page carries an ad about the NFFF, we might as well give that largest group in fandom a plug here too. Especially since it's one of the two clubs that have made me honorary members.

The National Fantasy Fan Federation is now ten years old. It is designed to be of service to every type of fan. There's the manuscript bureau, which finds outlets for the literary works of fans, and provides material for fan editors. There's its library, its mailing service, letterheads, and many other things you get from membership in NFFF. It costs only a dollar a year. You save that on discounts you get when you buy fanzines and books. You can't go wrong by joining this group. Write to William Berger, 912 E. 140th St., Cleveland, Ohio, for details. And don't forget to enclose a self addressed and stamped envelope!

SPACESHIP: 10c; October issue, No. 14; Bob Silverburg, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N. Y.. A nice hefty zine and a real dime's worth. Cover by Lawrence Saunders to illustrate his story that is featured in this issue, "Caution—One Bomb." The second story, "The Big Fraud," is by Joseph Semens. There's an article on the history of NFFF by Everett Winn. Books reviews, a report from Australia, several articles and four regular departments make this a zine worth the money and then some!

NEKROMANTIKON: No. 5; Manly Banister, 1905 Spruce Ave., Kansas City, Mo. The midyear 1951 number, and unfortunately the last. Manly is folding it. Many who have read it have wondered how such a voluminous fanzint could keep going with the paper going into each issue being worth a quarter by itself, without all the work. Ninety mimeographed pages for a quarter! And top quality material,

by fans and professionals who fought to have their works appear in this collector's item among fanzines. A Staten Island book dealer is already offering copies of this fanzine at 75c each!

There are twenty-four stories in this issue and seventeen poems and three articles. The stories, as many a fan can tell you from his own experience, are the choice of a far greater number that were submitted to Manly. Most of them are too short for a prozine like *Amazing Stories*. That's the reason why they didn't see professional publication.

You'll have hours and hours of wonderful reading if you're lucky enough to get a copy of this last issue. I'm sorry to see *Nek* fold. It's one of the finest things fandom ever produced. A labor of love that didn't count the cost in work and money.

* * *

I hate to end the column this time. *Nek* started me to thinking of all the wonderful fanzines that have come and gone. *Spacewarp*, *Dreamquest*, *Gorgon*, *Fanscient*... Too many to list. But there're the new ones, the first issues, mimeographed by clumsy hands that will find skill quickly, edited by quick minds that will become fascinated by the problems of publishing and become ambitious to put out the best fanzine of all time. And maybe one of them will. But one thing all of them will do. They'll find friends and companions for their editors. They'll give them hours of pleasure as they run them off and mail them to those who subscribed. They'll give you pleasure when you read them, too. Because they're written and published by guys and gals that have the same interest in fantasy and science-fiction that you have. And they're human.

Why don't you go back over the fanzines I've just finished reviewing and pick out half a dozen and send for one copy? It will give that boy or girl a real boost. And maybe you will like one or two enough to send for another copy. Will you? Swell!

—Rog Phillips



SCIENCE FICTION

BOOKCASE

THE OUTER REACHES, edited by August Derleth, Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York (\$3.95).

The prolific Mr. Derleth, one-man non-German band of what is sometimes referred to as American letters, has in this anthology, which ranges between the Graeco-Roman and catch-as-catch-can styles, taken his own, his publishers' and to a lesser degree his authors' lives into his (we hope) moderately well-manicured hands.

He opens his *Foreword* to this well-printed and jacketed volume by stating, "It is perhaps beyond dispute that editorial tastes often run counter to those of an author." Then, instead of leaving this truism with egg on its face, he proceeds to develop it to wholly unwarranted lengths by inviting a gaggle of more or less standard authors of stf to offer each the story he considers his best. Reader verdicts are thus summarily dismissed as the inconsequential items they may or may not be.

The results of such an unchaperoned union between author and his work are, as might be expected, extremely uneven. Yet there are some fine rare tales in the bouillabaisse—we found Poul Anderson's *Interloper*, Ray Bradbury's *Ylla*, Henry Kuttner's *Shock* and Murray Leinster's *The Power* vastly to our taste and we both suspect and hope that other readers will find other favorites among the stories

submitted by their creators.

However, the most entertaining feature of the volume to us lay in the fact that Mr. Derleth requested each contributor to include with his story a bit of written elocution as to why he had selected it. Some of these quasi-literate prose-caramels are truly out of this galaxy.

For example, says Donald Wandrei in a sort of cowcatcher for his *Finality Unlimited*, "I selected *Finality Unlimited* because it contained, up to the year when it was written, the most complete symbolism of my general and specific philosophy of living that I was able to state in narrative technique..." He concludes with "...The story was an effort to understand the relationship or communication lines or linkages between anyone and everything, throughout all time and space."

Space forbids more but bathos repeatedly rears its grinning head amidst the most sublime self-stated aims on the part of the authors. In short, don't skip the comment before each story if you wish to enjoy the full rich flavor of the book.

In a year less weighted down with stf anthologies, Mr. Derleth's compilation might rate a much higher position. As it is *The Outer Reaches* is spotty entertainment—with, praise Allah, a goodly number of spots entertaining in one way or another, not always, we suspect, intended by

authors or editor.

DOUBLE IN SPACE by Fletcher Pratt, Doubleday & Co., New York (\$2.75).

The two novellas that make up this volume are not culled from the vast amount of serially printed stuff matter piled up by Mr. Pratt before he deserted science fiction a dozen or more years ago in favor of the then more lucrative field of military and naval expertism. These are lettuce-crisp five-dollar-bill new jobs by the old master, representative of his finest recent work since returning to the field and fold.

Both are ingenious as to plot and gadgetry; both are well-constructed, if a trifle light in the bustle; both are products of Mr. Pratt's vast experience and genius for amassing information, relevant or otherwise, anent just about everything.

Project Excelsior, the first novella, is actually a spy-romance story set in a too-possible near-future, with conflict revolving about two space satellites, one a U.N. affair, the other Soviet. Each is up against an apparently insoluble problem the other seems to have solved, and the story is narrated through the sensibilities of Duruy, an officer of the U.N. satellite, who has fallen madly in love with a woman he knows to be a—sshhh—Soviet spy. Plot doesn't matter much in this one, fortunately—it's the ideas and gadgets that count. And both are top-flight.

The Wanderer's Return is wide-open space opera on an unusually thoughtful and adult scale. Its theme is frankly that of Ulysses and his wandering crew, here expounded by Commodore Lortud and his fleet of twelve space ships. Although the way back to Earth following their victorious campaign among the stars seems simple, like Ulysses *et cie.* they keep running into unexpected obstacles. A

neat detective-mystery angle develops along the way to give this edda both logic and suspense. We liked it a shade the better of the two, which mate up to make a highly readable volume.

SEEDS OF LIFE by John Taine, Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa. (\$2.75).

If you go for mad-scientist stories in which soundly hypotheticized science runs at least a dead heat with screwy characterization, you'll go for this one. Its central character is a dissatisfied drunken laboratory helper at the Erickson Foundation, who in a fit of pique destroys the experiment of the boss he despises, gets caught in the blast and is turned into a sort of superman.

His superiority over the current version of *hom. sap.* is such that he quite naturally comes to hate same and sets out like a ju jutsu maestro to make humanity destroy itself through the very benefits he unleashes upon society. A primitive idea and primitive characterization are kept in their proper places by Mr. Taine's pseudo-scientific ingenuity. You can have fun with this one if you don't dig too deeply.

GREY LENS MAN by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa. (\$3.00).

Chicago's "Doughnut King" is at it again, resurrecting his Asmarian-Boskonian feud from yellowing magazine pages, giving same a light dusting-over and putting it out between hard covers. This latest, like the others, includes sufficient planet-blastings, space-battles, sudden-inventions-in-the-nick-of-time and BEM-ish monsters who imperil the Earth to fill a whole shelf-full of comics.

These books do have a sweep and a sort of Boy-Scout-Handbook cleverness that makes them solid senders in

the teen-age juvenile league—but as always the even-slightly more mature are sunk quickly in a uniquely Smithian type of non-existent characterization and a un. Smi. type of dialogue that would be better off left unsaid or unwritten.

For instance, when the supermanish hero, Kim Kinnison, impersonating a dope-addicted space minor, saves a passenger vessel from disaster among the asteroids, its concerned captain tells him, "You were a man once. An engineer—a top-bracket engineer

—or I'm an offer's pimp."

Replies Kinnison, "white and weak. 'I'm all right yet, except once in a while...'"

"I know," the captain 'frowned'. "No cure?"

Kinnison says no and the captain asks him for his real name so that his folks back home will know he's still alive. To which Kinnison, 'shaking his aching head', replies, "Better not. Folks think I'm dead. Let them keep on thinking so."

On the whole we are forced to agree.

And Sharks Will Swim in the Streets

By Salem Lane

LAND, SINCE the beginning of time, has been rising and sinking and rising and sinking, and will continue to do so *ad infinitum*. About 2,000 years ago—as an example—a lavish structure was erected on one of the shores near Naples. It is evident that whoever was using the building in its early years found that it was sinking. They put in an 18-inch fill, laid a new floor above it, and set false bases around the columns. This was fine. Until volcanic ash began to cover the second floor of the structure. At which time sinking was resumed, and continued until the marble columns were surrounded by twenty-one feet of sea water. Small clams bored into the walls and the pillars, and the structure was lost from sight.

Then the coast began to rise, and in 1741 the building was rediscovered. By 1835 it had again begun to sink, and this

sinking process is still in progress, although at such an infinitely slow pace that neither in our lifetimes nor in those of our children will there be any difference.

It's interesting to speculate on what the results would be if the continent of North America should sink even a mere 600 feet. Interesting—and frightening. California would be submerged, as would Florida. The Gulf of Mexico would just about reach San Antonio, while Birmingham and Louisville would find themselves seaports. The mouth of the Mississippi would appear somewhere near St. Louis, its straits crossing Illinois to a great sea formed from the combine of the Great Lakes.

Corals would undoubtedly cover Florida, sponges would grow in Tennessee, Dallas would be filled with oyster banks, barnacles would cover the rocky shores near Duluth, and Chicago would be overrun with sharks.

THE COSMIC LABORATORY

By Leo Lewis

ASTRONOMY IS generally regarded as being as far from reality and practice as anything imaginable: It is assumed that, abstruse and theoretical, removed from common, everyday life, the austere thinking of astronomy rarely touches Earth, save when still—remote plans for rocketry are made. Actually, though, advances in astronomy often coincide closely with laboratory work here on Earth.

A specific example of the important work done in astronomy is demonstrated by the coronagraph, a simple—and complex—gadget for enabling astronomers to study the Sun's corona, that gaseous aura of hydrogen flame and fire which surrounds the Sun. Until the invention of the coronagraph a few years back by French

astronomers, scientists were able to study the corona only during rare, once-in-a-year (or decade) eclipses.

But what happens in the Sun happens in atomic bombs. The Sun is a huge atomic furnace, a continually operating A-bomb, and study of it is of vital importance to physics. Knowing this, astronomers are working their coronagraphs around the Sun-clock, analyzing and observing, collecting huge masses of data on the corona and feeding the dope to the atomic-bomb labs. All of this information will be collated and studied to further the understanding of the nature of atomic processes. In this way, the laboratory that is the Sun will be essentially an extension on a grand scale of Earthly laboratories.



WHEN THE WORLD WENT MAD

An "Amazing" Vignette

THERE WAS nothing left in the East. The cities were crushed shells of concrete and steel and people were scarcer than hen's teeth. I was working my way West—always keeping my eye on the Geiger. That's why I abandoned the car I'd started with and stuck to the bike. I didn't have to worry about gas—there wasn't much around—and I didn't absent-mindedly find myself going into hot areas. The war had been over a year but radioactivity hadn't left much. It was a barren, sterile, dangerous world, and I figured the best bet would be to work toward South America through Mexico. There'd been the least devastation there, I thought.

With winter coming on I didn't want to be caught up north, stopped by the snows. Food supply—from cans—was O. K., but the terrible isolation was impossible to stand. And that was the trouble. You did not make friends with strangers. I tried it twice and almost got my head blown off. The war had made the few remaining people band into little gangs out solely for their own preservation. Any stranger might be an enemy paratrooper, or just a looter. Nobody trusted anyone else. I didn't worry about enemies because I'd heard the dying radio reports in the Last Days and Europe and Asia were even more devastated than we.

I hitched my burp gun tighter against my shoulder and peddled on.

The Geiger was silent, so the region was safe. With darkness coming I decided to hole up in the next little town I came to—Sayville, Missouri, according to the beat-up remnant of a road map I was carrying. I was there in less than ten minutes. In the gathering dusk, quickly coming into full darkness, the "town" showed up as a collection of beaten hovels; already neglect, the absence of humans, had turned its vagueness into nothingness.

Then, just as I stopped beside a shed that had once been a garage, the soft night wind brought me the sound of voices—low and muted, but voices! I dropped to the ground, setting the bike on its side, unlimbered my burp gun, flipped off the safety and waited. I hoped nobody had seen me.

The voices came from a ramshackle building next to the erstwhile garage. Cautiously I crept toward a window and peered in.

A young girl—about eighteen—sat in a chair. Her face was a study in contempt.

But there was a touch of fear there, too.

Standing over her was a huge, grinning hulk of a man. He reached out a ham-like hand and grabbed the girl by the hair.

"For the last time," he said, "I'm asking you to come along peaceable-like. Me and Jake wants a gal." He slapped her lightly across the face with his other hand and there were red marks on her cheek. He was quite calm about the whole thing. He said levelly: "I'm gonna beat you to a bloody pulp and take you anyhow—so why not..."

"Both of you raise your hands," I said, and poked the nose of the burp gun over the window ledge. Big Guy's hands fell to his sides and his mouth opened. His companion, standing to one side, dropped his jaw. There wasn't a sound.

The girl jumped up and toward the door. "Come around to the side," I called. That slight interruption was too much, though. I barely caught the sense of Jake's motion, a blurred effect and the sound of a pistol. The bullet chipped splinters from the window frame. I loosed a burst and Jake crumpled.

The other remained standing with his hands half-lowered. The girl came around to me. "Go back in," I said, "and get their guns."

She went in without saying anything, picked up Jake's gun and then went to the Big Guy. That was my error—almost. As she reached for his holstered pistol his arms came down around her, claspings her to him. His own pistol was in his hand in an instant. "I'll kill her," he said, "just as sure as you move an inch. Drop that burp gun."

I let the gun slide down but at the same time my right hand, hidden by the wall, slipped out my automatic. When he saw the gun disappear, Big Guy made a fatal mistake. Still holding the girl, he walked toward the window. He had his gun on me and I could almost see his trigger finger tighten. Before he could fire, my automatic was over the ledge and I had sent three shots into him before he fell to the floor.

I stepped into the room and put an arm around the girl. She was sobbing softly: "Don't worry," I said, "we're going away. I'm going south, to South America. Maybe some people are left. Want to come along?"

She didn't answer but she pressed closer to me....

—Charles Reesor

THE READER'S FORUM



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dear Mr. Browne:

I'm an omnivorous reader, and AMAZING STORIES comes under a favorite category, science fiction. I like not only the stories, but the sundry features, and I'm coming to the defense of one of those features now. Of course I'm talking about the Club House and the flurry there.

Phillips does a good job, not only for AMAZING STORIES, but also for science-fiction fans, and I can't believe Ziff-Davis would throw out this feature because of the lack of discrimination and good taste in one fanzine sent in for review. I haven't seen a copy of any issue of the publication in question, but I have sporadically read a number of fanzines and found some amusing and interesting material. Granted, some of it is overly amateurish, but that's what these zines purport to be, amateur.

They are, I think, definitely an expression of an inexplicable kinship that exists in science-fiction followers. Don't ask me to explain it, I can't, but there is a healthy sense of fellowship in the field; a kinship among devotees that is the thing we're trying to promote on an international scale through UN. Surely there'll be a stray skunk. There was a pair of 'em in the ark, but we don't have to capsize the boat to get rid of rats...or skunks.

Phillips pinned back the ears of this particular pair of transgressors effectively, and exponents of such material can be put into permanent Coventry. Then you wouldn't be penalizing such nice kids as Charles Lee Riddle, Paul Ganley, Manley Bannister, Tom Covington, R.J. Banks, etc., as well as readers who like the Phillips comments via reviews.

Honestly, Mr. Browne, don't you feel a friendly glow when you see a stranger intently reading science fiction? I do. A something-in-common feeling. I've spoken to strangers on a bus because they were carrying a sf magazine and enjoyed instead of endured a long ride. I've had strangers speak to me in cafes where I forked food and read sf. (Population not so dense out here in the West. It's possible to lunch and read without a standing line waiting for one's chair.) So far at least said strangers have all been nice, and some have become good friends. The timorous little English girl traveling to Arizona to

marry the GI she met in London—I spoke to her first and now we correspond. She carried *Amazing*. The serious young man who said, "It's odd to see a woman reading science fiction" turned out to be a nuclear physicist at Los Alamos. We swap magazines and books.

No other field of writing touches this spark, draws such enthusiastic response that there is even a desire to supplement professional offerings—which is the stem of fanzines. It's a rather wonderful thing, if one wanted to moralize, that there's anything so completely free of the usual stumbling blocks of race, religion, etc., as the spirit exemplified in the publication of fanzines.

Shall I crawl down off my soap box and allow rebuttal?

Alice Bullock
812 Gildersleeve
Santa Fe, New Mexico

It is for the very reasons you mention, Alice, that The Club House still appears in the pages of Amazing. The Ziff-Davis science-fiction and fantasy magazines have always supported fandom in every possible way to help keep alive the camaraderie and mutual respect so strongly existing between its members. The Club House will continue to appear in these pages as long as the fanzine editors observe the dictates of good editorship.

—Ed.

STAND BY FOR REPAIRS

Dear Mr. Browne:

I wrote you the other day. But I am writing again, because there were some things I left out of the last letter that I meant to tell you.

I suppose you have a collection of books or magazines. And I suppose that you prize them and try to take the best care of them possible. I also suppose that you feel bad when any of them are damaged. Well, whether you know what I'm talking about or not, I hate to have a book damaged or torn. I have a prize collection (to me) of sf.

Unfortunately, several of my Ziff-Davis books were damaged. If you could possibly get what I need for repairs, I will pay whatever it comes to. What I need is:

Covers for AS, March, April and May '50
Covers for FA, October, November and December '49

Back Pages and Covers for FA, April,
May and June 1949

Please answer and let me know the prices of these covers, etc., so I can get them and make the necessary repairs before replacing them in my collection.

I thank you very much.

Paul Nowell

6528 Gentry Avenue

North Hollywood, California

Since we can't furnish what you want, Paul, we're running your request in this department in the hope other readers can, come to your rescue. You're welcome!

—Ed.

SOMEBODY FELL DOWN—HARD!

Dear Sir:

Your magazine is not amazing. It's flabbergasting. In the October issue there appeared a scientificism which would have made David Hume rejoice, and Isaac Newton fume. Quote: "A body will fall downward at eight feet per second the first second, accelerating eight feet/second/second." What mad universe taught Hadman her physics? Curious, I dropped the body of my section corporal down a deep well. It fell sixteen feet the first second, forty-eight the next, eighty the third, and so on. In a world where September has thirty days, acceleration due to gravity is thirty-two-plus feet per second per second. Or has Einstein changed all that?

Yours constructively,

Pete Grant, L80080

25 Cdn Fd Amb, CAPO 5000
Vancouver, British Columbia

But, Pete—September has forty days! If you doubt that, see the cover of Amazing Stories for October, 1951.

—Ed.

WE SLIP—ON A PIPAROO!

Dear Ed:

Your December issue was on the stands before I could finish last month's but I

(Continued on page 156)

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was able to read it rather quickly. Cover was as good as usual. Inside illos were pretty good.

I particularly liked *The Little Creeps* by W.M. Miller. *The Hatchetman* by Reynolds and Fred Brown, and *Checkmate for Aradjo* by Rog Phillips were good seconds. *Return Engagement* and *Somewhere I'll Find You* came at the bottom of the list.

Let me speak frankly now. You're slipping up as far as quality of stories is concerned. Occasionally you slip in a pip-a-roo such as *Proud Asteroid* by Fairman and *The Little Creeps* and a few others earlier in the year. December wasn't so bad but I look forward to January '52.

Harold M. Sadowski

1453 Balfour

Grosse Pointe Park 30, Michigan
 P.S. Anyone have any Heinlein? Due to a quick transaction the only novel left on my shelf is *Beyond This Horizon*. Any inquiries would be welcomed.

For our money, Walter M. Miller, Jr., is the brightest star to appear on the sf horizon in years. And like so many other fine writers in the field, his first sale was to this magazine.

—Ed.

ACCORDING TO MR. DOHERTY....

Dear Ed:

I just read that Don Wilcox is coming back in the February ish. I recently read his "Giants of Mogo". I hope "Iron Men of Venus" will be as good. Even tho you admittedly "tricked him into it. The best story in this ish was "Return Engagement". I'd like to see some more of this type, only longer. Next we have "Somewhere I'll Find You". Sounded like space opera, but I liked it. Rog comes next, but give him a rest. He's writing too much lately. "The Hatchetman"—well, I like Fredric Brown and Mack Reynolds individually, but together...no comment! Last we have "The Little Creeps". If this is a sample of what Miller does, I'm not going to read the 40,000-worder by him scheduled for next issue. Nuff said on that. I notice that FA has the sexier covers and illos. Well, that stuff is okay if you like it, but I don't. Why does everybody say that the mags printed before the war are so hot? Most of the mags printed nowadays have some pretty good stories. So what's so hot about the back numbers?

Here's some wants of mine. Would you print a rating on the stories like they have in the other mags? Would you please send me a list of your pen names? Could you send me a list of the stories you have written? Could someone please tell me how to get the last part of the serial "The Return of Tharn"? Could you print another story by Lee Francis? Some of his stories, especially "The Man from Yesterday", were pretty good. Jones is okay for covers, but not month after month. Let's have a little

variety. How about getting Hannes Bok or Malcolm Smith. I've begun to notice something. The larger the cartoon on the "Observatory" page, the smaller the "Observatory" becomes. It's a pretty sneaky way to cut down the size of one of my favorite parts of the mag. I've written enough and it probably won't be printed anyway. So I'll sign off.

William J. Doherty, Jr.
23 Florence Street
Cambridge 39, Massachusetts

SO MUCH FOR ALBERT

Dear Sir:

The Einsteinian conception of a curved "bubble" universe makes our universe like unto a dot; a period.

The word "conception" in this instance is a misnomer. All Einstein has done is to identify a period (a dot) in an ocean of ink.

Is the identification of a mere dot—genius?

Bill Vissaris
1334 84th Street
New York 24, New York

Professor Einstein's reply will be printed in full—just as soon as it is received by us. —Ed.

NEVER PUT OFF TILL TOMORROW...

Dear Ed:

It's about time that I wrote you—even if you don't know that it is. Like so many readers, I kept putting off telling you all how much I enjoy your magazines. Please notice plural. I began reading Edgar Rice Burroughs so far back that I don't even remember when. I do know that I was on my third reading of "Tarzan of the Apes" when I was nine years old. I think I'm safe in assuming that I have been reading science fiction for a good twenty years. What got me started on your magazines, I'm not sure. I've been haunting the book stands for them for a mighty long time—even when I had to choose between my weekly Saturday movie and your magazines.

Like all your fans, there are some stories I do not like. For instance the ones that leave me with an up-in-the-air feeling at the end of the story. Since everyone else has to go into the cover situation, guess I'd better tell you that I like 'em—all and sundry. No complaints. Just as long as they really illustrate—the story they are supposed to. If all these grippers about covers would band together and try to keep some of the filth that is put on our bookstands for any child to read that has the price of the book or magazine, they might do some good. A good instance is that book by a very popular author (?) about a small portion of land. Need more be said? If so, I've plenty to say on the subject.

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Very glad to have Don Wilcox back in the fold again. I enjoyed all the stories in the December issue. Guess I liked Marlowe's best.

Your article by Lea Owen, "Let's Have a Drink", made me think of my idea for solving the water shortage. How about a huge pipe with a series of relay pumps to drain off the flood waters? Alleviate the loss of property and lives caused by floods and put desert land to producing crops through irrigation? It seems to me that it is a feasible idea. How about it, you engineers? Will you tell me whether I am wrong or not?

A Very Satisfied Reader,

Mrs. Warren L. Cherry

c/o T/Sgt. Warren L. Cherry

3545th Air Installations Squadron

Goodfellow AFB, Texas

HOT SAND
By Omar Booth

URANIUM IS a limited natural resource. Nuclear physics is working madly to make breeder piles which can use some of the energy of uranium to convert other materials into radioactive matter. Plutonium is the best-known of these synthetic elements. And probably the future of atomic energy will be closely allied with the development of synthetics.

But there are other, more abundant, naturally radioactive materials, notably thorium and cerium. The latter is familiar as one of the constituents of the so-called "flints" in cigarette lighters. The former is known as the element which glows in gas mantles. Both substances have limited uses, though they exist in great quantities everywhere in the world.

That they are important to atomic physics is made clear by the fact that the Government has clapped all deposits of sands containing them (usually near the coasts) under Federal jurisdiction. An even better indication of the importance of thorium and cerium is the fact that the Indian Government has forbidden their export to the United States. Monazite sands containing these elements are in vast abundance in India.

As the uranium supplies give out, the technology of nuclear physics will turn more and more to these elements—and probably with great success. Eventually an entire atomic science can be built around these elements just as one has been built around uranium. Breeding from uranium may make this unnecessary, but it is likely that atomicists won't overlook the potential bombs and energy that lie in the use of thorium and cerium. They're a lot more important than gas mantles and cigarette lighters!

BATTLE BETWEEN BEES

NO ONE CAN accuse Americans of fomenting Civil Wars—except themselves—and the beekeepers of the insect world! Chemistry is coming forward each day with new and more powerful insecticides, but tampering with Nature in this way often produces highly undesirable aftereffects. Thus, while DDT and similar chemicals have a tremendous power to alleviate the miseries caused by mosquitoes and other unpleasant members of insectia, they also react upon extremely important and beneficial members of the Earth's ecology, in particular upon bees.

Carefully controlled experiments show the havoc created among bees which have fallen victim to DDT poisoning. A certain number of bees may become impregnated with this compound as a result of picking up contaminated pollen. Naturally they attempt to return immediately to the hive. Sensing something wrong, the drones and workers at the hive detect the incoming polluted bees and fly out to meet them, the deliberate intention of destroying them before they enter the hive. In the course of the royal battle which ensues, the defenders automatically become contaminated themselves and in turn are made the object of attack by the home defense. In short order the entire hive becomes the site of one vast civil war!

Since bees are vitally essential to pollination and fertilization of plant life, extreme care must be taken that the world does not destroy its food supply with DDT!

HIGH-FLYING BUTTERFLIES
BY TOM LYNCH

DR. SLATER, one of the members of the international body of rocketeers and scientists meeting in London, does not doubt that within our lifetime we will see the landing of manned rockets on the Moon and the launching of robot and manned satellites around our Earth, but he is worried about the people who will have to do the travelling.

He visualizes that the rocket pilot of the immediate future will be a man with a permanent hangover—as long as he's in the rocket—unavoidably nauseated as a consequence of "free fall" or gravitationalness.

All of the other hazards of rocket flight have been pretty well worked out, Dr. Slater thinks, with this exception. Scientists do not know how a human being behaves



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under the lack of gravity, except that there is every indication (from the simple experience of the rapidly falling elevator) that "free fall" is a condition which means perpetual sickness and that, unless drugs are discovered to counteract this, the rocket pilot is going to be a miserable man indeed!

Fortunately Dr. Slater hasn't considered all aspects of the problem. True it is that free fall will mean nausea and sickness for the inhabitants of the rockets, but this need be only a temporary condition, for a rocket flight of long duration may simply be given a circular rotation about an axis of flight and thus centrifugal force can substitute for gravity. Also, when rockets reach a stage where fuel problems are licked, constant accelerations can be maintained which also substitute for, and are undetectable from, gravity.

Dr. Slater's pessimism then, must be tempered with the realization that nausea is only a temporary concomitant of rocketry and that it can be overcome in time. As for the early rocketeers, it is certain that they'll gladly endure sickness for the ultimate ends.

HOW HARD

IS H₂O?

Lee Owen



IF SOMEBODY remarked that water has a "crystalline structure", the chances are that you wouldn't be surprised at all. "Sure," you'd say, "ice is nothing but crystalline water." But you'd be missing the point. That isn't at all what is meant by crystalline—ordinary running, dripping water has a crystalline make-up!

This surprising fact has been confirmed by recent experiments. Water, to both the chemists and the physicists, has been, for the last thirty years, a very confusing substance. It's a lot more than just simply "aitch-two-oh"! Recent work with super-sonics and sound probing in general has brought up some facts which could only be reconciled with theory on the assumption that water is basically crystalline. It so happens that if water consists only of separate molecules, as fundamental theory long believed, it would transmit sound with hardly any absorption, letting the waves slip through it with ease. But this is contrary to the experimental facts. When sound waves are passed through water, a portion of their energy—quite a bit of it—is absorbed—and not in raising the temperature of the water. Where did this energy go? Theory—the new theory—provided the answer. Water consists of numerous molecules held in a crystalline form. Sound waves are absorbed in breaking up this crystal build. That's where the energy went. To prove it, physicists subjected water to very high pressures

(breaking up the crystals) and got no sound absorption, indicating that the crystal-structure theory was undoubtedly true.

It is encouraging in a way to realize that even so humble and familiar a material as water is not completely known despite all the high-powered experimenting that has been done upon it. As some sophomore wit put it (better than he knew), "...there ain't much we don't know somethin' about, but there ain't nothin' we know everythin' about!"

IT'S ALL A LOT OF GAS!

By Clark Mayhew

IT IS COMMON practice to draw comparisons between the Solar System and, say, an atom with its part circling a nucleus. This enables us to visualize the sub-microscopic world of the atom considerably more easily. Recently, theoretical astronomers have been reversing the procedure and suggesting that we take the inverse viewpoint, looking at the universe as a sample of gas, treating it as we would a gas, and deriving conclusions therefrom.

This has proved fruitful. The extension, of course, doesn't concern the Solar System, but rather the vast depths of interstellar space which house enormous numbers of stars in clusters known as galaxies. These galaxies, in turn, can be considered portions of even larger clusters. Then by applying the principles of kinetic theory and the basic gas laws, interesting deductions can be made. Good approximation to observed fact can be made on this theoretical basis.

For example, in certain very dense clusters of stars the density is measured in terms of a half million galaxies per million cubic parsecs of space! Naturally, such a figure is almost inconceivable. It affords, however, a useful picture.

The slow milling with time of the components of the galaxies may be compared with molecular motion, though the time scale must be vastly stretched. The basic reason for this sort of theorizing stems from the natural desire to know whether or not the universe is really expanding or not. It's not easy to answer this question because it seems every decade or two a scientist comes up with another explanation, either for or against the idea, and which just as satisfactorily explains it. The use of this gas approach may resolve this confusion.

It's certainly a far step indeed in scientific advancement when we can look into the depths of space and consider it to be little more than a milling mass of gas subject to the same laws!

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Here's Gold Cup's terrific offer to you: Quality, hand-featured slacks at Wholesale Prices. How is it possible? Because Gold Cup—a great name in men's clothing—is selling directly to you . . . eliminating the middle-man. Result? Smartly tailored slacks that would normally sell for 25% to 50% more!

It's a low . . . low price which you should definitely take advantage of. No trouble . . . No bother . . . and you save money!

TOP CRAFTSMANSHIP

Each week . . . 10,000 pairs of super-luxurious slacks are produced by our factory . . . and each is top quality. All Gold Cup slacks are styled in famous Hollywood Model, complete with pleats and zippers. Perfect for dress, work and leisure wear. (Good all-year-round weight, too!) Saddle stitched for that smart style look . . . Complete with watch pocket and tabs on back pocket . . . And other features found in slacks selling for \$25 and more.

Only 100% Gabardine is used . . . and loomed especially for Gold Cup by one of the country's leading mills. Finest fabric development in years, with each yard specially treated to insure resistance to creases . . . and guaranteed moth proof!

EASY TO ORDER

Gold Cup Slacks are manufactured in waist sizes from 29 inches to 42 inches. Will fit any man who wears regular size clothes. Just send us your waist measurement and the colors you desire.

COLORS: Dark Blue, Med. Blue, Grey, Tan, Green and brown.



Leading sports personalities endorse Gold Cup Slacks. Order them for yourself . . . Immediately.

\$5.95

POSTAGE
PREPAID
BY
GOLD CUP

SEND CHECK, CASH OR MONEY ORDER

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

If within 5 days after you receive your slacks, you are not completely satisfied, return them (if they haven't been altered) and you will receive your full purchase price.



ORDER TODAY!

GOLD CUP SLACKS MFG. CO.
203 East 19th Street
New York 3, N. Y.

Gentlemen! On enclosing \$5.95 for each pair of Gold Cup Slacks ordered.

Waist Size in inches Colors

Name

Address

City State

\$15.20 an hour!

This is the average earning reported by Presto salesman **WILLIAM F. WYDALLIS**. "The sky's the limit" on Presto profits because of America's serious need for this new fire extinguishing discovery.

Folks Are
Amazed when you
Tell Them This New
Kind of Protection
Costs Only
\$3.98



Only Presto Has All These Features

- Ends Fire as Fast as 2 Seconds
- Chemical Contents 1.5 to 6 Times More Effective than Others on an Equal Weight Basis
- Weights Less Than 1 lb.
- Easily Held in One Hand—Even by a Child
- Needs No Inspection or Re-Charging—Does Not Corrode or Deteriorate
- Costs Only \$3.98—Yet Out-Performs Bulky Extinguishers Costing Several Times as Much
- Automatic Pressure—No Pumping
- Guaranteed for 20 Years—Certificate Is Packed with Every Presto

WOULDN'T YOU like to be making the kind of money William F. Wydallis is making? His story (printed at right) is just one example of the brilliant success that Presto salesmen are meeting everywhere! A Florida salesman earned \$600 in one month. An Ohio man earned \$2100 in 2 months. A New York salesman earned \$1500 in one month. A New Hampshire salesman added the Presto as a sideline and picked up an extra \$1800 in 20 months.

What Is the Secret?

PRESTO contains an amazing new chemical—"Chlorobromomethane" or "C.B." developed as a secret defense against fire during the war.

In comparing effectiveness of "C.B." in fighting various kinds of fires an authoritative testing laboratory report states: "It has been proved that 'C.B.' is about 1.5 to 6 times as effective as other common extinguishing agents on an equal weight basis."

This extra effectiveness of "C.B." means that Presto can be made light and handy enough for even a woman or child to use. Just a twist of the knob... and flames disappear! "Sells on sight" to Civil defense workers, owners of homes, cars, stores, farms, service stations, hotels, motorcycles, factories, offices.

Why Large Presto Profits Are So Easy

Everyone is terrified at the very thought of **FIRE!** Every year fire kills more than 11,000 people. Over half women and children! Civilian Defense authorities have said that in the event of atomic attack regular fire fighting forces will be fighting large fires and that the people must be equipped to take care instantly of the little fire that might so easily become a big one. Most people who see Presto in action want one or more—**ESPECIALLY WHEN THE PRICE IS ONLY \$3.98 EACH!**

You can demonstrate Presto in a few minutes, and every sale will net you \$1 or more. We re-fill your Demonstrator free and give you dramatically powerful printed sales material to "talk from"... free certificates testifying that Presto is **GUARANTEED FOR 20 YEARS.**

YOU DON'T NEED TO INVEST A PENNY. Just collect and keep \$1 or more every time you write an order—we collect the balance and deliver the extinguisher. (Or if you wish, you can buy from us at extra-low wholesale prices and then make up to \$2.18 profit per unit supplying both dealers and retail customers—we'll send you free details.)

Start Now—Mail Coupon

Get started in this rich new field now. Don't "put it off"! Every day you hesitate may cost you \$10, \$15, or even \$50 you could otherwise be making. Mail the coupon at right NOW for everything you need to get started right away! **MERLITE INDUSTRIES, Inc.**, Dept. 233, 201 East 16th Street, New York 3, N. Y.

Best Selling Months Just Ahead!
Don't Delay—Mail Coupon Now!



WILLIAM F. WYDALLIS

"Most specialty salesmen are always on the lookout for a 'natural.' The 'natural' of this decade is the **PRESTO TO FIRE EXTINGUISH-ER**... because it is handy in size, simple to operate, and in the right price range.

"For every hour I have devoted to the Presto, I find that I have earned an average of \$15.20 an hour. I am now convinced that extraordinary money can be made in the safety field. I am devoting more of my time to this product now since I have discovered that the earnings on this item are greater than any item I have handled in the past."

—William F. Wydallis
Van Wert, Ohio



CHARLES KAMA

This Presto salesman from Texas was featured as "Salesman of the Month" on the front cover of a sales magazine. He told the magazine's reporter:

"I think I've succeeded pretty well. I'm making more than a thousand dollars a month—and I haven't touched bottom yet."

MERLITE INDUSTRIES, Inc., Dept. 233,
201 East 16th Street, New York 3, N. Y.
Please send me illustrated sales literature, liberal profit plan, order blank—everything I need to get started making good money introducing the Presto Fire Extinguisher in my locality.
I CHECK HERE IF YOU WISH TO ORDER A REGULAR PRESTO TO BE USED AS A DEMONSTRATOR (\$2.50). Pays for itself many times over in increased sales. Can be returned as often as you like for FREE re-fill. You needn't enclose any money. Now—we'll send you Demonstrator C.O.D. (or if you wish to save money, enclose \$2.50 and we'll pay postage.)

Name.....
Address.....

City..... Zone No..... State.....
(if any)
IN CANADA: Moss Co., Ltd., 371 Dewar St., Montreal 1, P. Q.

"THIS WISDOM MUST DIE!"



Truths That Have Been Denied Struggling Humanity

FOR every word that has left the lips of bishops or statesmen to enlighten man, a thousand have been withheld. For every book publicly exposed to the inquiring mind, one hundred more have been suppressed—*damned to oblivion*. Each year of progress has been wilfully delayed centuries. Wisdom has had to filter through biased, secret sessions or ecclesiastical council meetings, where high dignitaries of state and church alone proclaimed what man should know.

Are you prepared to demand the hidden facts of life? Will you continue to believe that you are not capable of weighing the worth of knowledge that concerns your personal freedom and happiness? Realize that much that can make your life more *understandable* and *livable* has been left unexplained or intentionally destroyed. At first by word of mouth only, and now by private discourses, are *revealed* those truths which secret brotherhoods preserved in ancient temples and hidden sanctuaries, from those who sought to selfishly deprive humanity of them.

THIS free BOOK OF EXPLANATION

Let the Rosicrucians, one of these ancient brotherhoods of learning, tell you about these amazing truths, and explain how you, too, like thousands of others, may now use them to enjoy the fullness of life. The Rosicrucians, (not a religious organization) invite you to use the coupon opposite and receive the FREE copy of the fascinating, Sealed Book, with its startling tale of *self help*.



Scribe D.M.Z.
THE ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California, U.S.A.

Please send me your FREE Sealed Book. I am sincerely interested in learning how I may receive these long-concealed facts of life.

Name.....

Address.....

The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.